

Nova Scotia Forest Sector COVID-19 Guidance Document

During this COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to give some guidance to forest sector businesses on assessing their workplaces for continued operations at facilities such as sawmills, pellet mills and pulp & paper mills, as well as in the woods at harvest and silviculture worksites – all with a focus of keeping employees and communities safe.

The Government of Canada has identified workers in the forestry sector as essential services in their document, “Guidance on Essential Services and Functions in Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic”.

There are no exemptions in the Orders of the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Nova Scotia for the forest sector or its workers. The Nova Scotia Government has developed a tool for employers to help them understand how they can follow Order of the Chief Medical Officer of Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Please take a moment to go through the government’s Employer Assessment Tool using the example of your own workplace. The Assessment Tool can be found here: <https://covid19-employer-assessment.novascotia.ca/en>. Under the tool, the manufacturing supply chain (including forestry) is identified as one of the businesses that can continue to be open if they are following best practices.

It’s important that we all work together to protect the health of people all across that supply chain. All worksites will need to operate differently than ‘normal’...and this document will provide some guidance to make that ‘new normal’ easier to work in.

In all worksites, employees must practice social distancing, clean shared workspaces, notify supervisors or employers if they show any symptoms of COVID-19, and immediately self isolate and contact 811.

Understanding COVID-19

The Covid-19 virus is spread by contact with an infected person or with a contaminated surface or object. The best ways to protect yourself and others from the virus are:

- Washing your hands frequently
- Cleaning frequently touched surfaces often
- Practising safe physical distancing whenever possible

Do you need to call 811 to be assessed for Covid-19 testing?

- Do you have a fever greater than 38 degree Celsius (or signs of a fever)?
- Do you have a new cough or a cough that is getting worse?
- Do you have a sore throat?
- Do you have a runny nose?
- Do you have a headache?

If you answer yes to two or more of these symptoms, please call 811 for further assessment.

Assess workplace hazards

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it is especially important to take steps to stay safe at work. All supervisors and employees need to work together to assess health and safety risks and reduce them, including:

- Addressing the risk of exposure and how to control it
- Assessing how your workplace will be affected if one of your employees is absent

During a pandemic, you must do a review to identify the potential for exposure. This includes:

- Reviewing tasks and jobs to determine who is at the greatest risk of exposure and when the exposure is most likely to happen
- Looking again at previous hazard assessments to identify areas where the risk of exposure is greatest
- Reviewing the hazard assessment, identifying new hazards, and introducing controls as needed
- Reviewing and identifying potential staff shortages and how they affect operational and critical safety activities

How you can reduce risks:

- Consult with your Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee or Safety Representative to discuss what you could do to reduce risk and how effective each action would be. Consider any recommendations or Orders from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Eliminating hazards

Whenever possible, hazards should be eliminated. You could do this by eliminating any activity that isn't essential or that can be delayed until the threat of viral exposure is reduced or resolved. This may be difficult, but you must do whatever is reasonably practical to reduce the risk.

Engineering controls

Engineering controls either remove a hazard or provide a barrier between the worker and the hazard. Examples of engineering controls to reduce the risk of catching or spread viruses include:

- Physical barriers to isolate, such as installing Plexiglas or other form of enclosure
- Working area design, focusing on increased physical separation

Other recommended engineering controls are outlined in the Indoor and Outdoor Operations sections below.

Administrative controls

Administrative controls may be used in combination to protect and reduce workplace exposures. Examples of administrative controls include training, hand hygiene (provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers for remote harvesting and silviculture workers, and/or dedicated hand washing sinks for mill sites), respiratory hygiene (if beyond normal worksite requirements) , social distancing, alternate work arrangements, workplace cleaning, restricting workplace entry (e.g. to outside service providers), and limiting areas where people gather or visit such as breakrooms or common work spaces like control rooms or equipment trailers.

Additional considerations for reducing risk of exposure include:

- Revising work schedules to reduce the number of employees assigned to a given shift
- Reducing close contact with customers or co-workers through the increased use of phone (voice and/or SMS), and e-mail communication
- Postponing business activities that require personal interaction with customers

- Creating a buffer zone of at least 2 metres between an employee and a customer when customer service must be done in person and keeping meetings as short as possible
- Making accommodations for staff to work from home wherever possible
- Assigning high-risk workers (like people who are immuno-compromised,) to job tasks with lower risk of exposure
- Avoiding locations or activities that may represent a high risk of exposure
- Increasing workplace cleaning, providing the necessary supplies, and reinforcing personal hygiene measures
- Providing clean hand washing facilities
- Offering alcohol-based hand sanitizers when regular facilities are not available (or to workers working on the road, on harvest/silviculture sites, etc.)
- Regularly cleaning objects that are touched frequently, such as workstations, harvesting equipment cabs, doorknobs, handles, railings, tools, etc. with disinfectants or soap and water
- Providing boxes of tissues and ensuring safe and sanitary disposal of used tissues
- Removing magazines and papers from waiting areas or common rooms (like staff break rooms)
- Encouraging the washing of work clothing in hot water more frequently, including hard hat liners, gloves, and coveralls

Staff training on Covid-19

Employers, supervisors, and employees want to ensure they are doing everything possible to keep everyone safe and healthy at work. It is important to review this document together and document that you have done this.

All employees with potential occupational exposure should be trained on:

- The hazards associated with exposure, the potential ways of contracting the virus, and control measures to break the chain of infection
- The protocols in place to isolate and report cases or reduce exposure
- Awareness of physical distancing strategies-keeping a distance of 2 metres

- Appropriate control measures, such as cough etiquette (covering the nose and mouth while coughing or sneezing, coughing or sneezing into the bend of the elbow or into a tissue), and hand hygiene (washing hands or using alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available) to prevent transmission
- COVID 19 is a new hazard in most workplaces and there are questions on how PPE may be used. Public Health have provided direction for managing potential exposures to COVID19 that are to be applied in all workplaces. Only those workplaces with the approval of Public Health are able to work closer than the 2 metres. Even when working closer than 2 metres, other measures need to be considered to limit the need for PPE, such as physical barriers. Not all masks provide the same level of protection for COVID-19. Any mask being used as PPE for COVID-19 must be determined to provide the necessary protection and be used and maintained to ensure its continued effectiveness.

Hygiene best practices for forestry workers

Federal and Provincial Public Health are recommending the following practices:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use disposable towels to dry your hands.
- Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cough or sneeze into bend of arm and away from other individuals.
- Maintain recommended minimum physical distance separation as much as possible.
- Avoid direct face-to face interaction.
- Surfaces and items in any workspaces that are touched frequently should be disinfected on a regular basis.
- Avoid handling each other's personal effects (hats, gloves, clothing, kit bags, etc.).
- Do not share personal items such as beverages, cigarettes or cell phones.

See the following links for more information:

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/working-during-covid-19/>

<https://covid19-employer-assessment.novascotia.ca/en>

Cleaning and sanitizing/disinfecting

Ensure that all employees who have a duty to clean have received appropriate training and any required supplies and personal protective equipment needed.

Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces and objects is important in controlling the spread of COVID-19. Any surface that people's hands touch frequently should be cleaned and disinfected at minimum twice a day, and when visibly dirty. It is recommended that sanitation check lists are followed during this time and to consider having two lists – one for high risk (frequently touched areas) and another for low risk (areas that are touched less often). All items used for cleaning are to be disposed of properly.

Each workplace should be assessed for cleaning requirements in relation to the activities that occur, including the mills or plants, outside workers and their equipment, and any areas shared by people (washrooms, break rooms, eating areas, portable washroom, travel trailers, machinery, etc.)

Disinfectants should be used to eliminate the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Use products with a drug identification number (DIN) and labelled as a broad-spectrum virucide. A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms the disinfectant product is approved and safe for use in Canada. For a list of approved disinfectants:

www.canada.ca/en/healthcanada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html

Travelling to and from work

When possible, people should only travel in vehicles with people they live with, as long as they are healthy and showing no symptoms, and only when essential. However, there may be circumstances where they need to carpool with co-workers to get to work. In these situations, two or more workers can travel in the same vehicle, but should maintain physical distance as much as possible in the vehicle.

Here are some examples of how to maintain physical distancing:

- Limit the people per vehicle and spread out as much as possible
- Install a clear plastic barrier between passengers
- Alter travel schedules and/or work hours so employees are not arriving/departing workplace in large groups.

In addition, implement enhanced hygiene by ensuring internal and external touchpoints on the vehicle are sanitized before or after each travel session by the driver.

Employees should be encouraged to travel with the same people in the same vehicles to and from work/worksites to lessen the chances of contamination and spread.

Employers could provide each worker in a carpool with a letter from the company outlining the employee's name and their need to be carpooling for work purposes using the sample below.

Sample carpooling authorization letter:

Your Logo/Company Name

Carpooling Authorization Letter

Subject: JOB CONFIRMATION - WORKERS IN THE FORESTRY SECTOR

To whom it may concern:

Following the measures of the Government of Canada that have been put in place regarding COVID-19, as well as those of Provincial Government, here is a joint letter for those employed in the Nova Scotia forestry sector (wood processing, harvesting and silviculture) as an essential service worker, as outlined in the Government of Canada's Guidance on Essential Services and Features in Canada during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

By this letter, I (fill in the name of Manager/Owner) confirm that (fill in the name of Employee) is employed in the forestry sector as essential services worker and requires carpooling to travel directly between home and work for work purposes. The above-named individual is part of a carpool that includes other individuals from the same workplace.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Manager/Owner

Transporting groups (harvesting or silviculture crews) to worksites

Physical distancing must be maintained. Occupants will be spaced in alternating seats to allow for maximum distancing - this may require more trips or more vehicles to implement. In addition, implement enhanced hygiene by ensuring internal and external touchpoints on the vehicle are sanitized before or after each travel session by the driver.

Employers/supervisors should set up a regular process to pre-screen all workers separately before each trip to the worksite, asking the following:

- a) Have you been diagnosed with COVID -19 or are you awaiting test results?
- b) Have you been in contact with anyone over the past 14 days who has or is awaiting test results for COVID-19?
- c) Do you have any symptoms of COVID-19: two or more of fever, new or worsening cough, headache, sore throat or runny nose?
- d) Have you been in contact with anyone over the past 14 days who exhibited symptoms of COVID-19?

Individuals who answer “yes” to any of the questions will not be permitted in the vehicle. If they have answered yes to a) or b) then they will be advised to return home and self-monitor. If they answer yes to c), then they should be advised to return home and contact 811 (online if possible) to do a COVID-19 assessment.

Wearing a non-medical mask is another way of covering your mouth and nose to prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating others or landing on surfaces. A mask can reduce the chance that others are coming into contact with your respiratory droplets, in the same way that the recommendation to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues, or coughing and sneezing into your elbow, not your hand, can reduce that chance.

Monitoring health of workers

Before coming to work – employees are required to ask themselves the following questions before entering the workplace:

- Have you been tested for COVID-19 and are awaiting results?
- Have you tested positive for COVID-19 and are currently in self-isolation?
- Do you have any symptoms of COVID-19: two or more of fever, new or worsening cough, headache, sore throat or runny nose

Individuals who answer “yes” to any of the questions will not be permitted in the vehicle. If they have answered yes to a) or b), then they will be advised to return home and self-monitor. If they answer yes to c), then they should be advised to return home and contact 811 (online if possible) to do a COVID-19 assessment or report for COVID-19 testing

While at work - Workers are responsible to self-monitor their health while at work. Workers should notify their Supervisor immediately if they start to feel ill with symptoms of COVID-19. It is recommended they go directly home and complete the COVID-19 Self-Assessment tool online at: <https://811.novascotia.ca>, or phone 811.

If one of your employees tests positive for COVID-19:

- Public Health contacts them directly. They'll work with the person to identify all their close contacts and conduct a risk assessment to determine if any of their close contacts need to self-isolate.
- Public Health will directly contact anyone who needs to self-isolate. In some cases, this means Public Health will contact the person's employer if they were at work when they might have been contagious.
- If Public Health doesn't contact your workplace, that means they decided the risk to people in your workplace was low. You don't need to do anything if Public Health doesn't contact you, and any employees who weren't directly contacted can continue going to work.
- If any of your employees need to stay home, you can't ask them for a doctor's note. Your employees will contact you when Public Health has cleared them to return to work.

You don't need to close your business if one of your employees tests positive for COVID-19. However, you do need to:

- Clean and disinfect your workplace thoroughly, especially surfaces that are touched frequently
- Follow all directives about physical distancing and gathering limits
- Make sure your employees are following proper hand-washing and other hygiene guidelines

Make sure your employees are monitoring their health – to find out if they need to call, visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>, or call 811 about COVID-19.

Workers from outside NS

Workers entering the province must comply with the 14-day self-isolation requirement commencing on the first day of their arrival in Nova Scotia and continuing for 14 consecutive calendar days. The employer must have a self isolation plan prepared for the incoming workers that will indicate how many are arriving, from where, the location each will be self-isolated, and how they will be informed of the requirements and regularly monitored during the isolation period. This would include regular medical checks for any change in their condition as well as confirmation of their maintaining the isolation. Workers must be isolated from each other and understand that they are not permitted to leave their place of dwelling for any purpose until their 14-day isolation period is up. Workers must also have access to proper hygiene hand washing facilities. Arrangement must be made for security and food delivery during the isolation period. After their 14-day isolation period, physical distancing protocols must be adhered to.

Workers who are healthy people and who have to routinely cross the Nova Scotia land border for work. (e.g. live in NB and work in NS) may continue to travel without self isolation. Proof of occupation and work may be required at the border. Employers should consider providing written confirmation of the employee's name, place of residence, and place of work for inspection at provincial entry points.

Indoor operations

Manufacturing plants (pulp mills and sawmills) can stay open and must practice physical distancing (2 meters/6 feet) as best they can in the manufacturing part of the plant. This would include amending work and break schedules to limit people on shift or in lunchroom, setting up physical barriers between workstations where possible, etc.

Other work areas (administration and office areas, dealing with clients, etc.) should maintain physical distancing requirements and limit the number of people to 5 persons or less in a general area such as at meals and break times.

Workplaces must maintain hygiene requirements for high touch surfaces, which must be sanitized twice per day and limit the sharing of tools, equipment, and workstations.

Employees must closely monitor their health. If anyone starts to feel sick, they must immediately go home, self-isolate and complete the COVID-19 Self-Assessment tool online at: <https://811.novascotia.ca>, or phone 811

Entrances, Hallways, Common Spaces, and Personnel Movement in the Plant Minimize

hallway conversations and interactions and limit the number of people in these areas at a time to maintain physical distancing. Find ways to minimize common surfaces employees need to touch:

- Use auto-open doors, or encourage bumping doors open with hip or using foot on kick plate.
- Remove door closures where possible and keep doors open to allow employees to move.
- Between doorways without touching knobs where it does not impact food safety zoning.
- Add foot pulls to doors with frequent traffic prop interior office doors open whenever possible to improve air turnover in the building, and decrease touching of knobs/handles.

Employee Clocking In/ Out

Many timeclocks have web-based features that can be operated through phone apps. Consider other apps or methods employees can use to track time and submit to supervisors.

- Use phones to clock in and out or provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer near the timeclock.
- Consider if a supervisor can use a camera from another room to clock employees in and out.
- Consider if clocking in and out can be handled by journal entry afterwards by one identified person or supervisor.

Common Tools

- Items that people touch frequently, such as keyboards, touchscreens, buttons, etc. should be cleaned and disinfected between users.
- Identify high touch surfaces (e.g. touch screens) in maintenance and receiving areas.
- Clean and disinfect these surfaces on a separate cleaning schedule than those surfaces

in production areas to limit the chance of contamination through cleaning.

- Provide personal pens, markers, and manual grade stamps or disinfect them at least once per shift.
- Identify areas where employees frequently interact and develop cleaning and disinfecting procedures specific to those areas.

Break/Lunchroom Area

- Implement measures to minimize handling of shared food, dishes, and cutlery.
- Remove shared food containers such as shared coffee cream dispensers, salt & pepper shakers, etc.
- Do not share food, unwashed eating utensils and beverage containers.
- Minimize handling of multiple sets of cutlery.
- Practice good hand hygiene.
- Make sure to include outdoor areas and tables in the cleaning schedule.
- Consider using office spaces or conference rooms to distance employees, or to create separate lunch or break areas.
- Clean refrigerator handles, sinks and faucets, microwave buttons and handles and other kitchenette areas more often.
- Have soap and disinfecting wipes easily available in lunch and breakrooms.
- Clean facilities after each break.

Office/Clerical Work

- Limit exchange of files and paperwork to a minimum and avoid close contact.
- Separate office staff, ideally limiting offices to only one person per office space.
- Consider having as many people work from home as possible if they are not required on-site.
- Consider offering an alcohol-based hand sanitizer for people who go to the post office or bank.

- If you are delivering items to self-isolated employees at home, make sure you set up a system.
- Leave items on a doorstep or put the items into an already opened trunk.

Outdoor operations

In most outdoor forestry operations such as silviculture, harvesting, or loading/unloading of wood for transportation, maintaining space between workers is not an issue as they often work in isolation or well beyond 2 metres from their nearest co-worker. At times when they are not, workers must practice social distancing of 2 metres (6 feet), including at meal and break times, shift changes, equipment maintenance, or fueling, etc. and if not possible to do so, must limit gatherings to 5 persons or less.

Restrictions should be placed on worksites, limited to workers and their supervisors only, to limit face-to-face interactions. Wood pick up could be scheduled at times when machine operators and supervisors are not on site.

If meeting with clients such as landowners is necessary, then maintain physical distancing and limit people in the meeting at one time to five or less or use alternate means.

Any common use areas (equipment trailers, harvesting machines, etc.) need to be sanitized twice daily and equipment or tools need to be cleaned between use by different people. If possible, tools and machinery should not be shared.

Trucking and transportation contractors

Trucking, transportation, and transit must practice physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet) as best as they can. They must closely monitor their health. If anyone starts to feel sick, they must immediately go home, self-isolate and complete the COVID-19 Self-Assessment tool online at: <https://811.novascotia.ca>, or phone 811.

Workspaces and high-touch surfaces in the vehicle must be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day.

Workers should call ahead for delivery and pick ups to reduce face-to-face interactions and always maintain physical distancing while outside of the vehicle.

Safety concerns

Workplaces are required to take precautions to ensure the health and safety of their employees. If you're worried about safety in the workplace, you should talk to your immediate supervisor. If the situation isn't resolved, contact Occupational Health and Safety Branch at 1-800-952-2687