

## Reopening Guide for Joint Health and Safety Committees and/or Health and Safety Representatives

This document is intended for Joint Health and Safety Committee members (JHSC) or Health and Safety Representatives (HSR) to assist in re-opening workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional background information on hazard identification, inspections, investigations, and risk assessments can be found in the [CUPE Health and Safety Committee Resource Kit](#). The kit was designed for people who are already familiar with relevant occupational health and safety activities. For additional assistance, contact your CUPE National Representative.

As restrictions are partially or completely lifted, employers must continue to provide information, instruction, and training to protect the health and safety of workers. Additionally, an employer must continue providing a safe working environment by eliminating or adequately controlling workers' exposure to COVID-19.

JHSCs or HSRs should encourage the employer to ensure all steps will be taken in a manner which is safe and healthy for the employees, children, families, and the public.

To effectively control a hazard, it is important to understand the hazard. This guide follows the four steps in hazard assessment using the RACE Principle: [Recognize](#), [Assess](#), [Control](#), and [Evaluate](#). This will help you develop a plan, which should be in writing and easily accessible to everyone. The main goal should be eliminating worker exposure to the infectious virus by containing its spread in the workplace.

### Reopening Considerations

At least five **working days** prior to the Return Date, the JHSC/HSR should meet by videoconference to discuss required changes to procedures or to the workplace environment that may be necessary to ensure that the workplace is safe and healthy for all employees.

It's a good practice to do walk-through assessments with the JHSC or HSR member(s) to evaluate the workplace and work processes of employees represented by CUPE to identify potential areas of risk and priority action with respect to the new hazards posed by COVID-19.

Before the meeting, contact the employer to get answers to the questions on the chart below.

Reopening Considerations	Yes	No
Has a new hazard assessment been done to consider COVID-19?		
Have existing Occupational Health and Safety policies and procedures (infection, prevention and control plan, pandemic plan, infection control, etc.) been reviewed, updated and/or created for COVID-19?		
Is there proper ventilation? Have servicing of the system been scheduled prior to any staff returning to the workplace?		
Have the HVAC/cooling towers been checked for standing water and filters in HVAC systems changed?		
Have the plumbing systems been flushed to remove standing water in pipes?		
Have fire alarms, fire extinguishers, safety systems, and emergency lights been checked to ensure they are in working order?		
What procedures should be followed when first re-entering the workplace? (A "what to expect" sheet)		

## Step 1 –Recognize

The first step in following the RACE principle is to Recognize the hazards. This involves identifying hazards in the workplace through inspections, surveys, hazard mapping, body mapping, accident reports, test results, and observing the workers.

Identifying and acquainting workers with all hazards and sources of potential danger is the first step for an employer to establish due diligence. Topics for discussion should include:

- Identifying the hazards of COVID-19
- Identifying who is at risk of exposure
- Identifying workers’ tasks, duties, and areas of work for level of risk for exposure
- Identifying situations which may be unhealthy or unsafe for workers, and identifying effective systems for responding to such situations
- Identifying any required improvements to the workplace environment to promote safety and health in the workplace
- Identifying any programs and policies required by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and the related regulations, and developing a plan to monitor the effectiveness of those programs and policies
- Identifying any required changes to the workplace, including to equipment, machinery, or work processes needed to ensure a safe and healthy environment

## Step 2 – Assessing the hazard

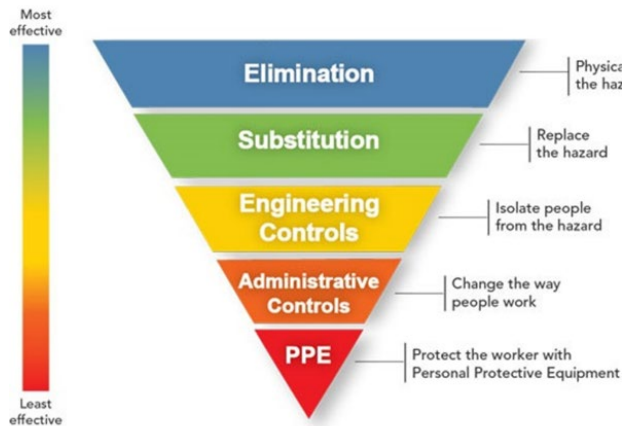
Learn everything about the hazard and its source, as well as training, policies, procedures, current regulations, research, how many employees are affected, best practices, and how the hazard affects the worker.

Review new or existing policies, protocols, and training programs related to infection, prevention, and control (IPAC).

Assessing COVID-19 Hazards	Yes	No
Is there compliance with the OHSA and its regulations? Are there other guidelines or rules to follow?		
Pandemic Response Plan: Are updates ongoing with new information?		
Is the pandemic plan effective at protecting workers?		
Have Infection Control Plans been updated/created to consider COVID-19?		
Is there an effective communication plan in place?		
Do we have measures and procedures to protect workers from exposure to COVID-19?		
Is screening going to be happening? If so, how and where?		
Do workers have the appropriate skills to effectively perform routine practices and additional precautions to avoid exposure to COVID-19? (If not, find out how this gap will be closed.)		
Is personal protective equipment going to be required by the risk assessment?		
Are there adequate stockpiles of PPE?		
Are workers trained on PPE use and limitations?		
Is there a list of records that need to be kept?		

### Step 3 – Controlling the hazard

Apply the Hierarchy of Controls, starting with controls at the source. If it is determined that workers must wear PPE, ensure the workers are trained on the use and care of the equipment and on its limitations.



The most effective way to control a hazard is at the source through elimination or substitution.

If it is impossible to control the hazard at the source, the next step is using engineering or administrative controls.

The final step is at the worker level, using personal protective equipment. This is the least desirable way to control the hazard.

Without removing people from the workplace, elimination at the source cannot be achieved to control COVID-19 as a hazard. Because of this, there needs to be a thorough evaluation of what tasks can be done without requiring the physical presence of workers. Once those tasks are identified, the workers who perform them can be removed from the workplace and do them remotely.

The next level of control measures would involve engineering or designing the workplace to control exposures to COVID-19.

**Engineering Controls** isolate the hazard or involve designing equipment and processes to reduce the source of exposure. These can include:

- Physical barriers, machinery guards, equipment design
- Ventilation: general, local, natural
- Screening clients/patients/students before entry to the workplace
- Limited or single points of access
- Limiting suspected or confirmed cases to isolated area of the workplace
- Ensuring there is a design for physical distancing in place and in practice at work when in-person meetings are held as required
- Using furniture, mirrors, and barriers to encourage people to walk/use stairs in a single direction and keep separate where possible to prevent people accidentally meeting face to face.

**Administrative Controls** change the way people work. They can include:

- Training for new process or the way work is to be done
- Policies, programs, standard operating procedures
- Self-monitoring for workers
- Clear directions on when and how to self-isolate
- Clear directions on what to do if symptoms develop
- Shiftwork schedules that can be monitored for contacts should a case be declared
- Limiting the circulation of staff in the workplace, including ensuring that teams are composed of the same people from day to day where possible
- Staggering break-times, staggered playtime, staggered toilet time

- Ensuring social distancing in the workplace, including arrival at and departure from work, break/lunch times, and size of space used for in-person meetings
- Developing a plan for joint communication to the employees represented by CUPE regarding the promotion of social/physical distancing measures, hand hygiene, and cough etiquette at work
- Designated equipment
- Segregated screening and isolation procedures and rooms
- Contaminated waste management procedures.

**Personal Protective Equipment** or PPE is the defense of last resort in the Hierarchy of Controls. Not that:

- PPE should only be used when the hazard can't be eliminated or completely controlled by engineering and administrative controls
- Training must be provided in PPE use and care, limitations, how to put on/remove safely, and fit-test
- PPE must be clean, stored in a convenient location, and not create other hazards (e.g. discomfort/heat)
- Training must include what to do with PPE when you're done using it (discard or clean?).

#### Step 4 – Evaluate

Ensure the controls are protecting all workers. Talk to the workers and continue monitoring accident reports to make sure injuries and illnesses are reduced. Considerations for this step include:

- Developing a process to consider and promptly resolve all complaints related to the health and safety of workers
- Ensuring the existence of a mechanism for employees to bring concerns about COVID-19 exposure risks at the workplace to the attention of the JHSC or HSR
- Developing a mechanism for the JHSC or HSR to provide feedback on the effectiveness of control measures that are implemented
- Implementing assessment or emergency drills to identify weak planning, training effectiveness, or areas that need to be changed in the plan.