

Questions and Answers

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[Re-entry to the workplace strategy](#)

Is the Government of Canada aligned on the Re-entry to the workplace strategy or is it done by department? How could differences in provincial health directives and guidance regarding COVID-19 affect the federal guidelines in NRCan and other Government of Canada offices, if any?

Departments are responsible for developing their Strategy for the Workplace Re-entry following guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada and OCHRO as they are under federal jurisdiction. That being said, the management of potential cases must follow local and provincial health advice.

Does the strategy deal with employees who make presentations during conferences?

All travel is subjected to Deputy Minister approval. It is expected that conferences will be on hold until further notice.

[Phases for re-entry](#)

What is Phase 0?

We are currently in Phase 0, meaning that we are preparing for the Re-entry. Some employees have re-entered the workplace, namely those who are preparing our buildings. Much work is currently being done to make sure that our offices, labs and equipment are safe for our return, by procuring any necessary PPE, conducting environmental testing, arranging for cleaning, and installing barriers and signage that will allow for required physical distancing.

It is only once we are confident that all preparations have been made to ensure the health and safety of employees that Phase 1 will begin.

What is the difference between Phase 3 and 4? They seem very similar.

This is correct. The difference lies with the level of impact on productivity. There is a certain level of subjectivity in this assessment and the decision should be made upon discussion between the employee and the manager.

In what phase have in-person meetings with Indigenous groups been slated?

For the moment, in-person meetings should not be held. Before meeting with any Indigenous community, there should be consultations with them to ensure that it is safe.

As time goes by, we have been hearing that employees' mental health has been impacted negatively by being away from colleagues. The phases only consider individual return but is there a possibility to have small teams return to work for one day to be together?

The Pulse Survey shows that NRCan employees' mental health is fairly good. While the idea to bring back intact team may seem like a good way to be connected, risks associated with proximity are still too high to be considered without specific reasons (for example, some lab work may require most members of a team being present in the office).

Have you considered that many people would prefer not to return to the physical office until a cure/vaccine is in place? Return to the office may ramp up stress for many people.

The gradual return to work is planned in such a way that people who can continue to work remotely in an efficient way can continue to do so.

In Phase 5, will it be possible to get together in person for meetings no matter how small the meeting room?

It is still too early to know what will happen in Phase 5. Currently, all meetings should take place virtually.

Will you try to determine who wants to telework on a full-time basis, on a part-time basis or not at all when the time comes to return to the workplace and to use the data to plan the return?

All employees and managers are supposed to have had a conversation to determine the capacity to work remotely and to discuss personal circumstances, including the desire to go back to the office. That information was used to plan each phase.

If someone from an early phase chooses not to enter, can people from later phases opt or apply to go in earlier (in the place of those opting out of returning)?

People have been identified to re-enter in specific phases based on their functions and are expected to return when they are supposed to. If any personal circumstances could prevent an employee to return, it should be discussed with the manager. Another employee cannot take their spot as the re-entry is based on the level of disruption and only employees who must return should.

Will I be forced to return to the office even if I am uncomfortable returning in my set phase?

If your work cannot be conducted effectively from home, you will have to return to the office unless you have good reasons (for example, health condition).

Facility Re-entry Plans

If I work in a region but do not report to the centre, how will it work for my return?

The responsibility to plan the return to a specific building lies with that building's Senior Building Officer.

You say that the responsibility to plan the return to a specific building lies with that building's Senior Building Officer. Does it mean that my manager in Ottawa has no decision-making authority with respect to which phase I will return?

Your manager had a discussion with you to determine in which phase you will return. That information was shared with the Senior Building Officer.

How do I know who the Senior Building Officer is?

This is the highest-ranking official of the major occupying department or agency in a building. You can [consult the list](#).

Will the Re-entry Plans be updated once the school boards announce their plan for the school year?

The Re-entry Plans are designed to evolve and adapt to the changing realities. The Re-entry plans will likely not change because of the school/daycare, but it could affect who returns.

As we see other jurisdictions that have eased their measures go back into lockdowns, some more severe than the first lockdown, is there thought being given to a Phase 6 or a Plan B should this plan need to be modified or abruptly aborted?

The situation will be monitored closely and if it was necessary at any point in the re-entry, buildings could go up or back a phase, or even return to the full working remotely requirement.

Who will make the call on reverting back should it becomes necessary?

It really depends on the situation. Senior Building Officers have to explain the factors that will bring them to moving through the phases, in either direction. Public Health Official guidance will also be followed closely.

You mention that, after receiving the OK to enter the building, an employee would be able to go back to work within the two weeks wait period. Is the two-week wait period optional and is it only for the first phase?

Employees will be provided with a 2 weeks notice before entering the building for their specific phase. They can choose to enter the building prior to the two weeks if they choose to. Some SBOs may not provide this possibility to employees. This will be for all phases.

When will Phase 1 begin?

There is no set date for the reopening of buildings.

Each Senior Building Officer must complete their Facility Re-entry Plan to ensure building readiness and employees' health and safety. Once the plan is approved, employees will be informed at least two weeks in advance of their re-entry date.

Some buildings across the country have just begun their planned re-entry. If you are working in one of those buildings, you will have received an email marking the start of the two-week notice period; you may even have begun your own process of returning. Other buildings will begin their phase one re-openings in the coming weeks.

How long will each phase last?

Each phase will last a minimum of 3 weeks. Once a phase is launched, the situation will be monitored to evaluate success before deciding whether to move forward with the next phase.

I understand there are no dates set yet for future phases, but it would be very helpful to know our assigned phase well ahead of time. This would demonstrate full transparency.

Your manager should know your re-entry phase and should have discussed this with you.

Will the buildings be allowed to move to different phases at different times, or will NRCan move as a whole?

Each Senior Building Officer must complete their Facility Re-entry Plan to ensure building readiness and employees' health and safety. Given that the situation will be different at each building location and plans will be approved at different times, all buildings will move through the phases at their own rhythm.

Are employees expected to be back full time (5 days per week) once their respective phase begins?

As part of employee-manager conversations for determining the phases for planned re-entry, one of the factors for discussion included how many days and hours per week would be ideal for support maximum efficiency. This information is helping to inform Facility Re-entry Plans by providing options for addressing capacity issues and ensure physical distancing measures.

How will new employees be added to the Re-entry Plans as part of the planned phases?

The lists of employees will be revalidated with the ADMs whenever a building is about to begin a new phase.

Will someone who has taken on the role of a Floor Emergency Officer (FEO) or Occupational Health and Safety Representative be forced to return to the office when anyone on their floor returns at the different phases?

The FEO will not have to return to the office. Weekend and afterhours procedures would be in place in case of an evacuation.

In some buildings, there will be a requirement for some Occupational Health and Safety Committee members to return to the workplace on an ad-hoc basis to perform inspections as part of their responsibilities.

How many employees are in each phase?

It depends on the building and the phases.

Will employee training be mandatory? What is the role of the manager/supervisor in training employees? Will the department provide a consistent training deck to be delivered to ensure consistency?

No mandatory training has been identified so far for everyone in the department. Some buildings have developed a mandatory orientation prior to re-entry. As all buildings are different, it is not possible to go with only one training – it must reflect the reality employees will be facing.

Are there office onboarding procedures in place for those that were hired during the pandemic (e.g. security pass, equipment, desk)?

Yes, onboarding procedures have been adapted to the new reality. Hiring managers are provided with detailed instructions anytime a new Letter of Offer is issued. More information can be found on [The Source](#).

Will there be an employee poll during each phase to get a sense of how things are going?

People will not be asked to go to the workplace unless it is safe. That being said, SBOs will be monitoring how the rules are respected in different ways – pulse surveys are an option.

Personal and Family Considerations

What options are there for employees whose manager discussion was one-sided and didn't cover the employees' personal considerations?

Managers should have had open discussions with each of their employees. If this wasn't the case, employees could speak to them again, reach out to another manager. They could also contact their union representative.

What options and resources are available to me if I feel that my director/manager is not consistent with the departmental policies, such as not permitting telework and classifying my position and my co-workers' positions as Phase one if I feel that our positions better fit a later phase?

Managers should have had open discussions with each of their employees. If this wasn't the case, employees could speak to them again, reach out to another manager. They could also contact their union representative.

If an employee is at risk due to a disease such as type 2 diabetes, is he excluded from the return to the office et can he continue to work from home?

The employee must discuss this with his manager, who must take into consideration those circumstances when making a decision as much as possible.

Some of my colleagues suffer from chronic coughing. What can we do to not stigmatize them?

The best way to avoid stigmatization is to be open and tolerant. Your manager should discuss that issue with the team and the employees in question.

What will be the expectations this fall with respect to parents of young children who would attend school on a part-time basis? Will they need to spend time at night to work all the hours scheduled or will they be able to resort to the leave code 699?

You must discuss with your manager to determine the best course of action.

If the employee has any physical or mental conditions (e.g. anxiety/stress related to the virus), is the manager able to force the employee to return to work after Phase 5 if they are able to work from home and be productive?

When we are in a telework situation (when telework has to be approved by the manager as opposed to mandated), any telework request would have to be handled by the employee's supervisor and subject to their approval.

One may decide not to return until a vaccine is available. Will there be updates as to when a vaccine might be available in order for us with compromised immune systems to make an informed work decision?

Information on the pandemic and the virus is available. Please consult reliable sources of information such as the Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada websites.

How will seasonal allergies, which present as some COVID-19 symptoms, be handled? Will the employees suffering from those allergies continue to work remotely or will they be authorized to come into the office?

If you have allergies and take medication that control symptoms, you should be able to return to the workplace. You should discuss with your manager.

Considering the high risk of contamination from the COVID-19 virus for employees who commute to work by using public transportation, have you considered that risk in the different re-entry phases?

The need to use public transportation is a personal consideration that the employees should discuss with their manager.

You said that the decision to use public transportation is a personal decision. However, according to the [Guide to discussions about personal circumstances](#), employees who have no choice but to use public transportation should work from home if possible.

That is true but the situation could be different in the case of employees who must return to the office because they are unable to work remotely efficiently.

Regular Leave and Leave Code 699

What are the expectations for the use of leave code 699? How long will the code be available to employees?

NRCan expects there will be a decrease in the use of “Other Leave with Pay” (code 699) as buildings begin to re-open. However, code 699 usage remains an option in certain situations. NRCan expects managers and employees to engage in good faith discussions and assess each situation on a case-by-case basis. Managers should also contact [Labour Relations](#) to discuss specific situations.

Please note that guidance around usage of code 699 will continue to evolve with the COVID-19 situation. More information on leave code 699 can be found [here](#).

Can my leave code 699 request be denied for any reason?

Although the granting of leave code 699 is not a guarantee, more information on leave code 699 can be found [here](#).

What do I do if I feel my rights with respect to the leave code 699 are being dismissed?

If you are not in agreement with a decision made by your manager, you can reach out to your union representative.

Will I be penalized for deciding to work from home one day if I’m feeling ill (seasonal allergies or otherwise) or will I be forced to take a sick day?

If you are sick (other than COVID-19) you will have to take a sick leave. If your symptoms prevent you from going to work but you are able to work remotely, speak with your manager but you should be able to work remotely.

Where can I find more detailed information about leave code 699?

Please note that guidance around usage of leave code 699 will continue to evolve with the COVID-19 situation. More information on leave code 699 can be found [here](#).

Public Transportation and Parking

What is the long-term parking solution? For example, would it be possible to discuss with Impark the possibility to grant more than one parking permit for each parking space in order to facilitate the common use of those spaces?

Several options are currently looked at to offer more flexibility to parking space users.

What if we do not have a parking permit, are not within biking distance and not comfortable taking the bus? What should we do for parking?

There are a few private parking lots around the office, there is parking on the street and you could ask for a parking pass for the Booth Street Complex.

Are the parking spaces for electric vehicles at 580 Booth Street available for employees?

No.

The reserved parking spaces in front of 580 Booth were used by employees who do not hold parking passes. Can the department confirm that those spaces are still ours?

Yes, if you kept your parking permit.

There has been a substantial increase in bicycle thefts in Ottawa since the start of the pandemic. Will improvements be made to the bicycle parking at 601 Booth which is currently not secure?

Security is aware of the increased bike thefts in the areas of 555, 601, 615 Booth Street. Security cameras in the areas have captured some incidents. Security is actively working with the Ottawa Police to address these issues.

I am in Phase 5 and have a parking pass for 580 Booth. Will that spot be shared with those returning in Phases 1-4? If so, will the cost be shared as well?

There is currently enough spots available for all parking pass holders in the Booth Street Complex returning in Phases 1 to 4. As soon as Re-entry begins, only parking pass holders will be allowed to access the two parking lots.

Many of us continue to pay for our parking spots at 580 Booth. Yet it sounds like the parking is being offered to those in the office, which is fine. But will there be further discussions with Impark or NRCan to provide a discount to the parking permit holders? It seems like the parking permit holders are subsidizing the parking of others with no relief in sight.

Unfortunately, Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), in consultation with the Treasury Board Secretariat, has determined that there will be no parking fee reimbursements issued by the Government of Canada or any agent acting on its behalf (Impark) at Crown-owned buildings.

As you may be aware, NRCan does not own the parking lots, and so was unable to influence this decision. Impark, as a third-party service provider, manages the lots but only receives a small administrative fee from your monthly payment. The bulk of your payment goes directly to the Receiver General.

If you wish to cancel your parking permit, please email [Mario Levac](#). However, note that if you do cancel, there is no provision in place for you to retain your parking “seniority” should you wish to purchase a new parking permit later on.

Is the parking spaces closure that was planned for early May still going forward?

Yes, they are now closed.

Future of Work

Has the current situation prompted a re-think of the move towards Workplace 3.0?

Work has begun to define the Future of Work.

Has the government considered securing more swing space / hotel space opportunities? If there were buildings/spaces available in various communities, this would allow people to go to work somewhere within a more reasonable commuting distance.

This is not being considered at this time. The focus is on making our facilities safe for re-entry.

Is NRCan considering reducing its building footprint?

This is a possibility in the future, but there has been no word about this yet.

If an employee is able to work from home and be as productive either at home or in the office, are they able to continue to work from home indefinitely if they wish to after phase 5? Or is this up to the manager's discretion?

We are currently in a remote work situation. In other words, this is mandated. When it becomes a request from the employee, it goes back to telework agreement and must be approved by the manager.

Could telework become the norm?

NRCan has not made any decision in regards to the Future of Work. Further consultations and work will be done in the coming months to look at the best options and to leverage the learnings of the last few months.

Remote Work and Telework

Let's suppose that we are to return in Phase 1 because there is some work that needs to be done at the building quickly. Let's suppose also that after a couple of weeks, most work can be done remotely. Should we then be completing a telework application?

If there is no need for an individual to work in the building, work should be completed remotely.

Will telework agreements be required to be completed/signed/approved by manager?

Telework agreements will likely be required once it becomes a choice and it is no longer a requirement to work from home; however, particular cases should be discussed between the manager and Labour Relations. Managers can contact their Labour Relations Advisor directly or send an email to the [Labour Relations](#) mailbox to discuss specific situations.

How do we apply the compressed workweeks when we work from home?

Usually, they apply the same way. Discuss with your manager.

With respect to telework, will the tools created during the pandemic such as the Teams platform be kept in the future?

Yes, our IT team is working on rolling out Microsoft Office 365 Suite to all employees on a permanent basis.

How should we handle the request from an employee who wants to telework from a different location than his principal residence, for example another city or country?

Many factors must be taken into account and will vary depending on the situation. Managers can contact their Labour Relations Advisor directly or send an email to the [Labour Relations](#) mailbox to discuss specific situations.

As a person who runs a home-based business, I had to convince my employer that I was not in a position of conflict of interest in my job. Now that I am using my home office that is for my business, am I in a conflict of interest that was forced upon me?

As long as you are continuing the mitigating measures you were advised to undertake when reporting your privately owned business, you should not be in a position of conflict of duties or interests. You are asked to continue your efforts to make a distinction between your NRCan activities and the activities of your personal business, ensuring that you refrain from using NRCan equipment or electronic networks when working at your home business and not to use any information or data that is not available to the public. It is also important to make

sure that your home business responsibilities do not impede your NRCan duties and responsibilities.

We suggest that you contact the [Centre of Expertise on Values & Ethics](#) so that they can properly document the current situation you find yourself in and provide you with any further advice if needed.

Can I continue teleworking when things return to normal?

Telework must be approved by the employee's supervisor and a telework agreement must be in place. Such agreements are not transferable from one job to another and would have to be reviewed and agreed if there is a change in management. Furthermore, all telework agreements must be for a set period of time and must be reviewed prior to being extended.

Given that telework will be a more popular option for individuals, how will this affect networking opportunities for employees?

This new reality will greatly change the culture of the workplace. Teams will have to find new ways to network and connect. There are many great examples and suggestions available online.

Will NRCan provide us with a letter for income tax purposes to enable us to claim telework expenses incurred during the pandemic?

The TBS has indicated that the Canada Revenue Agency is developing guidelines about that for the next income tax season. It would appear that a simple email from your manager is enough to prove that your residence is your principal place of employment.

Will employees who won't return to the office until the later phases and who will now need to increase their Internet package because their service provider is no longer waiving data overage charges be able to obtain some kind of reimbursement?

For the time being, organizations are instructed to **not** compensate for utilities (e.g. Internet, hydro, gas, insurance) except for Internet in exceptional circumstances (i.e. Northern or remote locations where Internet service is difficult to access). Please see the latest on [managing employees during COVID-19](#). It will be possible for employees to claim these expenses as work-related expenses in their income tax return.

Are employees currently working from home eligible for tax exemptions?

TBS has advised that the Canada Revenue Agency is developing guidance on these issues for the upcoming tax season. This will be shared as soon as possible.

IT and Equipment

For employees returning in earlier phases who do not have headsets, will these resources be provided so they can participate in Teams meetings from the office?

Employees can ask for headsets to be purchased for them when returning to the office.

Will the bandwidth be able to handle Teams videoconferencing?

SSC and NRCan are working together to increase bandwidth.

Will laptops be provided to students hired to work remotely?

That is unlikely. New employees, including students, are asked to use their own device to access the telework portal. New laptops are currently being rolled out to employees by priority and type of functions.

If we will continue with Teams, will we ever get access to the extended version, which allows people to call in by phone?

People can currently access Teams by phone.

Will there be more details about how to support repairs to existing NRCan IT equipment?

Appointments can be made with IT for in-person services.