



# Hierarchy of Control Measures in the Workplace

COVID-19 Preventive Measures in the Workplace  
– Interim recommendations



*Pour des milieux de travail en santé*  
Réseau de santé publique  
en santé au travail

June 12, 2020

These measures apply when sustained community transmission has been confirmed by public health authorities. Based on current knowledge, it is known that the disease can be transmitted by asymptomatic people who are carriers of the disease. Therefore, preventive measures are recommended at all times.

Any resumption of non-essential services must be carried out in such a way as to control the transmission of COVID-19. In order to avoid a resumption of transmission, [several conditions must be met](#).

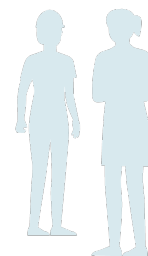
The preventive measures recommended by the government for the general population and the [basic recommendations for all workplaces](#) [in French only] apply, unless more restrictive measures are specified.

Special attention must be given to pregnant workers and to workers with certain health conditions. Please refer to the following recommendations:

[Pregnant or nursing workers](#)

[Workers with severe chronic diseases](#) [in French only]

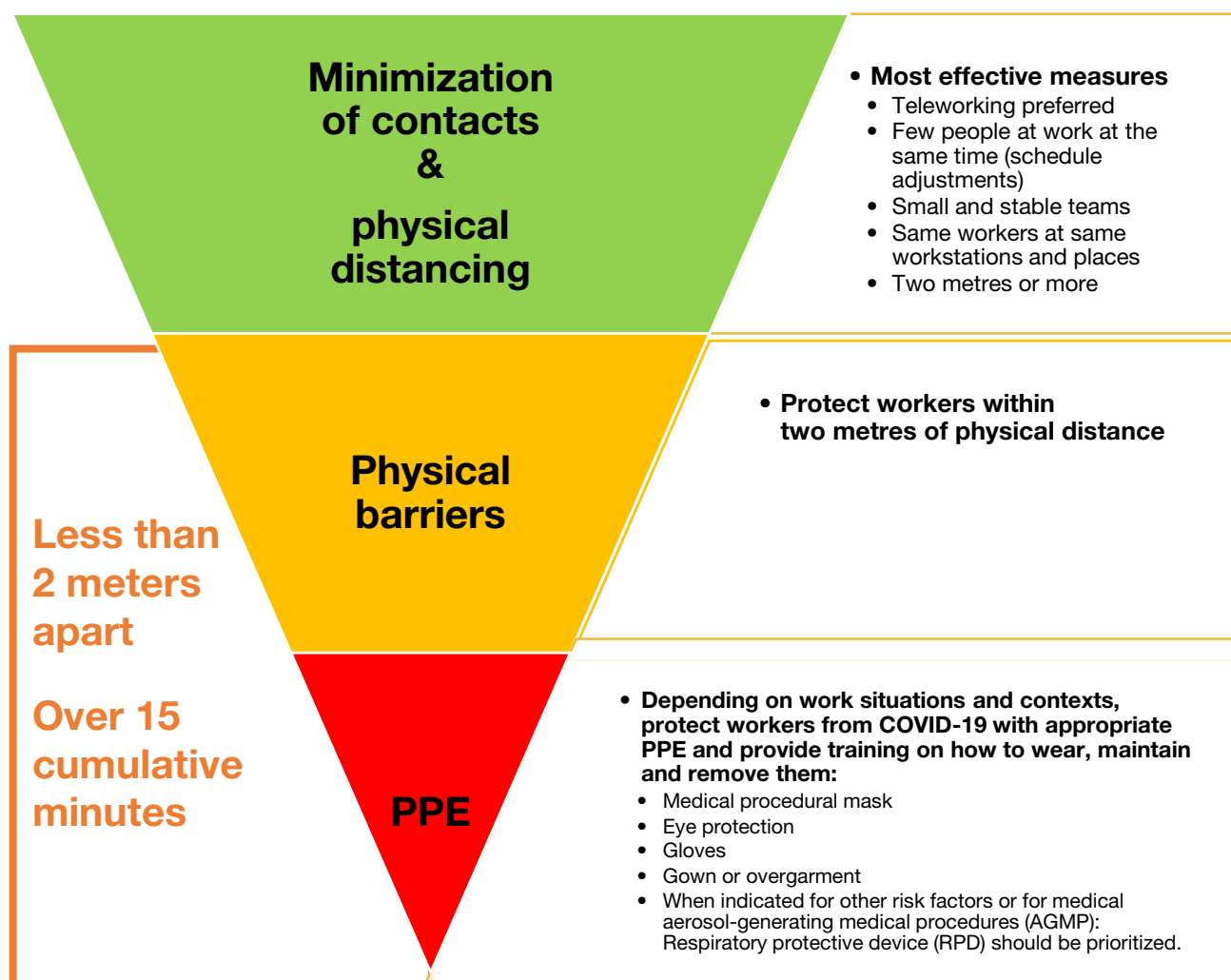
[Immunosuppressed workers](#) [in French only]



## Hierarchy of control measures against COVID-19

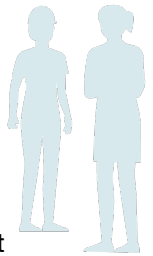
Public health recommendations for occupational health are based on the principle of a hierarchy of preventive and protective occupational health measures according to their effectiveness in the specific context of COVID-19. The measures presented in this information sheet are in addition to other measures recommended for workplaces and workers, which in combination increase worker protection, such as:

- ▶ **Exclusion of confirmed cases, case contacts and symptomatic workers.**
- ▶ **Hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and voluntary wearing of face covering.**
- ▶ **Cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and objects regularly.**
- ▶ **Proper ventilation of work areas (premises and vehicles).**
- ▶ **Communication, information and training, etc.**





## Minimization of contacts and physical distancing



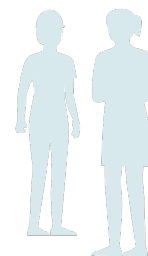
The number, frequency, duration and proximity of contacts are factors increasing the risk of transmission of COVID-19. The more people there are, the greater the likelihood that at least one of them will be infected (symptomatic or not). Minimizing the number, frequency, duration and proximity of interactions, as well as respecting a minimum physical distance of two metres at all times between persons are the most effective prevention measures. These must be prioritized:

- ▶ Opt for teleworking.
- ▶ Reduce workplace activities to those deemed essential.
- ▶ Keep the number of workers present on site to the absolute minimum required.
- ▶ Limit the number of persons in the workplace (workers, clients or any other suppliers or subcontractors) by reorganizing work and services.
- ▶ Opt for small and stable work teams that remain consistent over weeks or even months, to avoid the multiplication of interactions:
  - ▶ Always keep the same work teams – keeping as few workers as possible in these teams;
  - ▶ Keep the same workers at the same workstations as much as possible and ensure that workers are assigned to a single work site.
- ▶ Avoid direct contact (e.g., handshakes, hugs).
- ▶ Reorganize physical workspaces and work activities so as to respect the two-metre physical distance between persons:
  - ▶ Modify work methods;
  - ▶ Avoid in-person meetings and gatherings. Opt for alternative methods such as videoconferencing, phone messages or pre-recorded video messages. If meetings are absolutely necessary (e.g., for security reasons):
    - ▶ Reduce the frequency and duration of in-person meetings to the minimum necessary in a space large enough to respect the two-metre distance between individuals at all times.
  - ▶ Limit outing and moving about to what is strictly necessary along to reduce contact with people outside the workplace.



## Working less than two metres apart from others with a physical barrier

- ▶ When the above measures do not make it possible to eliminate working less than two metres apart from others:
  - ▶ Install an adequate physical barrier to separate workers from colleagues and clients. Refer to the recommendations of [SAAQ](#), [INSPQ](#) and [IRSST](#) [in French only];
  - ▶ No personal protective equipment (PPE) required.



## Working less than two metres apart from others without a physical barrier



No personal protective equipment against COVID-19 is required when:

- ▶ The minimum two-metre distance can be maintained with any person (colleagues, clients, etc.) **at all times or almost**, that is to say:
  - ▶ Any given worker must not have contact within 2 metres of others for a period exceeding 15 minutes<sup>1</sup>;
  - ▶ On a continuous or cumulative basis;
  - ▶ During a single work shift.

**Exception:** Additional protective measures are required when there is a potentially aggressive clientele or the possibility of contact with biological fluids. See below.

- ▶ In a vehicle where there are consistent pairings of workers (i.e. who work together for weeks or even months, such as consistent paired police officers). In this context, it is absolutely essential to ensure that all of the prevention measures recommended in the information sheets specific to the type of work are strictly observed.



Wear a quality<sup>2</sup> medical procedural mask alone when:

- ▶ It is impossible, due to the nature of the tasks performed, to respect the 2-metre physical distance but all colleagues are wearing procedural masks.
  - ▶ Note: If already required for security reasons, eye protection must be maintained.



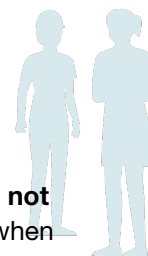
Wear a quality<sup>2</sup> medical procedural mask and eye protection (safety glasses or face shield)<sup>3</sup> when:

- ▶ It is impossible to maintain the 2-metre physical distance with colleagues who are not wearing procedural masks.
- ▶ It is impossible to respect the 2-metre physical distance with clients.
- ▶ Due to the clientele, the beneficiaries or the nature of the interventions, there is a possible risk of being contaminated by biological fluids (e.g., aggressive clients or beneficiaries; risk of being spat in the face or having hands put in one's face during interventions).

<sup>1</sup> The 15-minute limit is a benchmark.

<sup>2</sup> Ideally, masks with compliance testing (ASTM) should be preferred. For details on quality standards and for criteria to help the employer choose the right masks in situations of real or apprehended shortages, refer to the following documents: [Mesures exceptionnelles pour les équipements de protection individuelle lors de pandémie](#) and [Masques chirurgicaux ou de procédures : choix de l'équipement sur le choix des masques de procédure](#) [in French only].

<sup>3</sup> Protective eyewear must cover the sides of the eyes (corrective eye glasses are not protective eyewear).



### Wear a face shield alone covering the face up to the chin

- ▶ Based on the scientific knowledge currently available, wearing a face shield alone **does not offer the same level of protection** as wearing a procedural mask with eye protection when the worker is less than two metres from other persons.
- ▶ **Is possible as a solution of last resort:** when the ambient conditions can cause fogging of the eye protection when worn with the procedural mask, despite the attempt to find technical solutions to remedy this (e.g., duration of risky tasks, ventilation, application of products preventing fogging, etc.) and the fogging presents safety risk to workers.
- ▶ **Is possible as a solution of last resort:** in a context where the surrounding conditions are such that they jeopardize the effectiveness of the procedural mask (bad weather, oppressive humidity, etc.) and no other solution is available.



### Wear a quality<sup>4</sup> medical procedural mask, eye protection (safety glasses or face shield), gloves and an overgarment (e.g., gown) when:

- ▶ There is direct contact with a person with symptoms associated with COVID-19 or when less than two metres from a confirmed case.



### Tasks already requiring the use of a respiratory protective device:

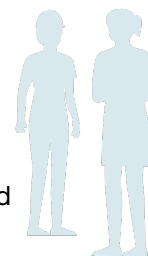
- ▶ For tasks where workers already use respiratory protective devices (RPDs), these should continue to be used and should not be replaced by a procedural mask, as they provide adequate protection against COVID-19. However, the following measures must still be applied:
  - ▶ If work is performed within two metres of persons not wearing an RPD or a procedural mask, add safety glasses or a visor covering the face to the chin, if not already worn and if the RPD is not covering the entire face;
  - ▶ RPDs should be used as part of a respiratory protection program including fit tests.



### Tasks requiring the use of gloves

- ▶ Wear gloves when they are normally used for performing the task.
- ▶ If gloves are not usually required, it is not necessary to wear them to protect against COVID-19. In general, the wearing of gloves to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 is not recommended unless otherwise advised (for example when there is contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 or with a symptomatic person), as it may produce a false sense of security. Gloves can become contaminated and subsequently favour transmission of the virus (e.g., infect the wearer when touching their face, contaminate surfaces touched).
- ▶ The use of gloves for cleaning and disinfection can help protect hands from irritation caused by chemical products.

<sup>4</sup> For details on quality standards and for criteria to help the employer choose the right masks in situations of real or apprehended shortages, refer to the following documents: [Mesures exceptionnelles pour les équipements de protection individuelle lors de pandémie](#) and [Masques chirurgicaux ou de procédures : choix de l'équipement sur le choix des masques de procédure](#) [in French only].



### Tasks that already require the use of an overgarment or gown:

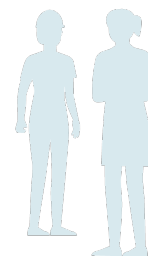
- ▶ Wear the overgarment usually used for performing the task, and ensure that it is cleaned daily in hot water with the usual detergent.
- ▶ If an overgarment is not usually worn, it is not necessary to wear one to protect against COVID-19 (except when there is contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 or with a symptomatic person).



### Removal of PPE

Depending on the PPE worn:

- ▶ Remove gloves, overgarment, eye protection and the procedural mask or RPD in a safe manner:
  - ▶ Remove the gloves and discard them after use in a hermetically sealed bag or in a lidded contactless trash can. Then wash your hands or use a hydroalcoholic solution;
  - ▶ Remove the overgarment, put it in a resealable bag and wash your hands with a hydroalcoholic solution (60% alcohol);
  - ▶ Remove eye protection device and wash your hands with a hydroalcoholic solution;
  - ▶ Remove the mask by handling it only by the elastics or straps without touching the face-covering section. Discard it after use in a tightly sealed bag or a lidded contactless trash can. Finish by washing your hands with a hydroalcoholic solution.
- ▶ Disinfect reusable equipment (e.g., eye protection device or RPD if reusable) as well as the surface where it was deposited pending disinfection using a product suitable for this equipment.
- ▶ Dispose of the bag containing the gloves and mask, or any other disposable material.
- ▶ Ensure that hands are washed with soap and water (lather at least 20 seconds before rinsing) or use a hydroalcoholic solution (60% alcohol) after the intervention.
- ▶ Take the bag containing the overgarment home to wash with hot water and the usual detergent. Avoid shaking the bag. Discard the bag or wash it if reusable.
- ▶ Wash your hands.
- ▶ Watch the following video: [Procédure d'habillage et de déshabillage pour les précautions gouttelettes contact avec protection oculaire](#) [in French only].



## Examples of application



- ▶ Kitchen workers at a distance of two metres from each other and from clients.



- ▶ Assembly line workers who are within less than two metres and where all workers wear procedural masks.
- ▶ Group transport where workers cannot sit more than two metres apart and where it is impossible to put up a physical barrier.



- ▶ Massage therapist or hairdresser (less than two metres from clients).
- ▶ Interventions with potentially aggressive beneficiaries or clientele, regardless of the duration of the interaction.
- ▶ Interventions with customers who may contaminate the worker with biological fluids, regardless of the duration of the interaction.



- ▶ Worker in a slaughterhouse where the level of humidity dampens the procedural mask too quickly and causes fogging when worn under a visor (despite the attempt to find technical solutions to remedy this).



- ▶ Worker in a community organization offering accommodation who has to take care of a client with a cough and difficulty breathing.



- ▶ Water treatment plant worker for certain specific tasks.



- ▶ Housekeeping personnel.

**NOTE:** The preceding recommendations are based on the latest information available at the time of writing. Given that the situation and knowledge about the SARS-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19) are evolving rapidly, the recommendations in this document are subject to change.

## Hierarchy of Control Measures in the Workplace

### AUTHORS

SAT-COVID-19 Working Group  
Direction des risques biologiques et de la santé au travail de l'INSPQ  
[Réseau de santé publique en santé au travail](#)

### WRITING

Mariève Pelletier, specialist scientific advisor  
Stéphane Caron, medical advisor  
Mylène Trottier, medical advisor  
Direction des risques biologiques et de la santé au travail, INSPQ

### UNDER THE COORDINATION OF

Marie-Pascale Sassine, head of scientific unit, INSPQ

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the [IRSSST](#) and the [CNESST](#) for their comments provided during the revision of the [French version of this information sheet](#).

### LAYOUT

Marie-Cécile Gladel  
Direction des risques biologiques et de la santé au travail, INSPQ

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

Valérie Beaulieu

### IMAGE CREDIT

flaticon.com

### TRANSLATION & REVIEW

Nina Alexakis Gilbert  
Karl Forest-Bérard, scientific advisor  
Nektaria Nikolokakis, specialist scientific advisor  
Mylène Trottier, medical advisor  
Direction des risques biologiques et de la santé au travail, INSPQ

The French version is entitled *Hiérarchie des mesures de contrôle en milieu de travail* is also available on the website of the Institut national de santé publique du Québec at: [www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/3022-hierarchie-mesures-contrôle-milieu-travail-covid19](http://www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/3022-hierarchie-mesures-contrôle-milieu-travail-covid19)

© Gouvernement du Québec (2020)

Publication No.: 3022 - English version

