



Vestechpro Guide to Health Practices for Clothing Industry Employers for a Safe Work Environment during COVID-19

Good practices to implement for restarting
activities

Reading time: 10 minutes

Context

On April 28, the Quebec government announced its plan for the gradual re-opening of activities beginning in May. This plan allowed retail businesses that are not located in the Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC) and that have direct access to the outdoors as well as businesses involved in the supply chain to these businesses, to reopen as of May 4. MMC retail businesses were able to re-open on May 18.

Manufacturing companies were able to resume their activities on May 11 with a reduced workforce, or 50 employees plus half the number of remaining employees. Also, as of May 25, restrictions on the number of employees in manufacturing companies were lifted.

As stated in section 51 of the [Act respecting occupational health and safety](#) (AOHS), “the employer must take the necessary measures to protect the occupational health and safety and physical well-being of workers.” It is therefore the employer who is responsible for implementing strict measures aimed at limiting the risks of exposure and transmission of the virus within the company.

The purpose of this guide is to assist employers in the clothing industry in implementing these measures.

Before Restarting Activities

Occupational health and safety are everyone’s business. It’s therefore appropriate for employers to involve workers in the planning and organization of a return to work, to promote dialogue and co-operation.

Revising Schedules

- Organize work teams so that they are as small as possible.
- For each work team, organize and distribute the employees’ schedules so that there are as few people as possible in the same place. For production lines, assign employees separate duties at specific workstations to avoid staff rotation in the same area.
- Organize break periods and employee meals so as to limit the number of people who can meet simultaneously in the areas provided for this purpose.
- For pregnant or breastfeeding women, the immunocompromised, chronically ill, or people over 70, follow the government’s recommendations as the crisis evolves.
- Provide staff to clean and disinfect the premises, clean washable masks, empty bins, etc.
- Pay attention to employees who are concerned, or who have personal constraints (for example: childcare), etc.

Supplying Personal Protection Equipment and Maintenance Equipment

- Depending on the risk of exposure, provide enough non-medical masks for all employees. Be aware that the mask should be replaced at least every four hours or when it is wet or soiled. In addition, when the employee removes his mask (for example, when eating), he

- must subsequently replace it with a new mask. Three or more masks per person, per day, must be made available.
- Depending on the risk of exposure, also stock up on gloves and safety glasses.
 - If masks are to be washed, provide the area and equipment required to wash them (washing machine, dryer and standard detergent).

Redesigning the Workplace

- Provide bins with lids for depositing lined plastic bags containing soiled personal protective equipment. Place these bins in strategic places: at the exit of the workplace, near the lunch room or outside. If there is no sink near the bins, place a hydroalcoholic gel dispenser nearby.
- Ensure a minimum two-meter distance between employees: if they are too close to each other, space the workstations and use duct tape to identify the areas. Proceed in the same way for all common areas (for example: in the lunch room).
- In areas where it is difficult to maintain a minimum two-meter distance between people and to protect employees who are in contact with visitors (for example: at the reception, customer service, etc.), use Plexiglas^{MD} panels to create a physical barrier.
- When possible, in confined and/or busy areas, indicate in which directions traffic should flow by placing arrows on the ground.
- Visibly display good practices in strategic areas: how to put on and take off masks; wash and disinfect hands; cough or sneeze without contaminating; as well as preventive measures and procedure to follow in case of symptoms. See Appendix 1 for posters offered by the Minister of Health and Social Services, and the CNESST.
- Install hydroalcoholic gel dispensers in strategic locations (entry/exit of each room, common areas, near workstations, etc.).
- Provide soap, paper to wipe your hands and a non-contact bin at each sink.
- Whenever possible, have a sufficient number of tools available (for example: scissors, wire cutters, etc.), office supplies (for example: pencils, stapler, etc.) and computer accessories (for example: mouse, keyboard, etc.) to avoid sharing between employees. If these items are in limited supply, put cleaning/disinfectant wipes and posters near them to remind employees to clean them after each use.
- Make sure that mechanical aids are available (pallet trucks, forklifts, etc.) to load and unload trucks in order to limit the number of handlers.
- Remove non-essential items from common areas (newspapers, etc.) that can be handled by various people and that are non-essential. Ensure healthy air circulation. Please refer to the following link for further information:

<https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/publications/2992-indoor-environment-covid19>

What should be done if a worker has COVID-19 symptoms?

If workers experience COVID-19 symptoms, it's important to plan a procedure beforehand. This procedure should include the following:

- If the worker is not at the workplace, make sure he doesn't show up for work and ask him to follow the [instructions for people who are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms](#).
- If the worker is at the workplace when symptoms appear, isolate him in a closed room and have him wear a procedural or surgical mask, or, if these are not available, a non-medical mask. Call 1-877-644-4545 and follow the directions. Disinfect all surfaces where the worker may have been in contact.

Debriefing Meeting

Before resuming activities, organize a meeting (ideally from a distance, if not, outside) to inform employees of the new precautionary measures. If it is not possible to meet remotely, provide masks for all participants. Discuss the following topics during the meeting:

- The date when access to the workplace will be permitted;
- Even if employees can go on site, teleworking is preferable when possible;
- When returning to work, employees must take preventive measures to the letter: maintain a minimum two-meter distance from others, wash their hands regularly, cough or sneeze into their elbow, not touch their face and wear a non-medical mask;
- If employees experience symptoms, whether or not they are at work, it is essential that they immediately notify their supervisor. The supervisor must apply the procedure defined in the event of infection of individuals and notify the employees;
- Inform employees of the new work schedule as well as the scheduled times for breaks and meals for everyone;
- Communicate any changes that have been made to workplace redesign. If necessary, develop a plan to ensure that everyone knows where the hydroalcoholic gel dispensers, workstations, personal protective equipment are located, as well as the bins for disposing of them, etc.
- Mention any other new measure and ask that it be complied with;
- Demonstrate the right technique for putting on and taking off a face covering without putting yourself at risk to make sure everyone is aware;
- Indicate that you are available to employees if they have any concerns or questions.

After/During the Restarting of Activities

Human Resources

- Listen to employees, their concerns and personal constraints, (e.g.: childcare), etc.
- Limit employee business travel, visits to customers and suppliers.

- The *Labour Standards Law* applies to individuals in voluntary or compulsory isolation. If the individual has worked a minimum of three months for your company, they can benefit from a maximum 2-days paid leave over a 12-month period. Please refer to the following link for further information: <https://www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca/en/leaves-and-absences/sickness-or-accident/index.html>
- Before allowing an individual into the workplace, use [Canada's self-assessment tool](#) to question their health and make sure they do not exhibit any COVID-19 symptoms;
- Get daily information on the state of health of employees in isolation;
- An employee infected with COVID-19 can return to work after a 14-day period since the onset of the acute phase of the illness if he has not had any acute symptoms for 24 hours and has not had any fever for 48 hours;
- If an employee begins to experience COVID-19 symptoms, follow the previously established procedure.

Hygiene Measures

- Everyone must comply with basic preventive measures: maintain a minimum two-meter distance from others, wash their hands regularly, cough or sneeze into their elbow, not touch their face and wear personal protective equipment.
- Empty bins regularly.
- Ideally clean every 2 to 4 hours (or at least every shift) sanitary facilities, doors, door handles, faucets, refrigerator and microwave handles, tables, chairs, switches, telephones, washrooms, computer accessories, shared tools, or any other object that employees frequently handle. Disinfect them at least once a day. Please refer to the following link for further information: <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/covid-19/environment/surface-cleaning>
- Disinfect sanitary facilities and eating areas at least once a day.
- Procedure for washing non-medical masks:
 - Remove masks only from the bag to put them in the washing machine.
 - Wash at a minimum 60°C temperature for at least 30 minutes and tumble dry until the mask is completely dry.
 - Wash your hands before removing masks from the washing machine and before removing them from the dryer. When masks are dry, place them in packs of 3 or 4 in disinfected bags and close the bags. Empty the dryer filter after use and then wash your hands.
- Change your non-medical mask after 4 hours of use or as soon as it is wet/soiled. Follow the instructions for putting on the mask (wash your hands and then put on the mask while making sure it covers your nose and chin) and for removing it (wash your hands, remove the mask by taking it by the flanges, immediately put it in the bin provided, close the bin lid and wash your hands and the bin lid if you have touched it).
- Meetings: limit the number of participants, and ensure a safe distance between each individual. If possible, hold meetings remotely or outdoors. After the meeting, disinfect everything that may have been in contact with participants: tables, chairs, pencils, etc.

Meals and Breaks

This is the time when employees are most vulnerable: they are taking off their masks, socializing with their colleagues, and they might also be taking off their gloves and bringing food to their mouths.

- Ideally, do not exchange dishes or utensils. In cases where dishes are shared with the company, clean them with hot water and soap and make sure that the individual handling it (storing it, for example) has previously washed their hands with water and soap for at least 20 seconds.
- Ensure that the meal and break schedule is complied with to avoid having too many people at the same time in the area provided for this purpose. If necessary, post the lunch room schedule outside the lunch room.

Additional Recommendations

- Inform all partner companies (suppliers, subcontractors, etc.) of measures implemented within the company to minimize the risk of COVID-19 infection. Remind them of the importance of these measures and invite them to collaborate.
- Ask deliverers and suppliers to deposit goods at the entrance of the building to prevent them from walking around the building. Specify that an employee must be present to validate receipt of packages.
- If possible, carry out handling operations in a separate area from the rest of the company's premises.
- If you receive a package with shipping times of less than 3 days and/or you doubt the measures taken by the company that sent it to you or those taken by the transport company, you can put your packages in quarantine for a 3-day period.

To Do Continuously

- Listen to employees, their concerns and personal constraints, etc.
- Observe all instructions.
- Keep informed regarding the evolution of COVID-19 and remain aware of new guidelines and recommendations.
- Everyone should pay attention to their symptoms at all times. If necessary, use [Canada's self-assessment tool](#).

Recommended Posters

Posters from the Minister of Health and Social Services:

[Cough or sneeze without contaminating](#)

[Hand washing- simple and effective](#)

[How do disinfect your hands](#)

[How to put on a mask](#)

Poster from the Standards, Fairness, Occupational Health and Safety Commission:

[Preventive Measures for the Occupational Health of Workers in the Manufacturing Sector](#)
(French language)

About Vestechpro

Vestechpro is a college transfer centre (CTC) that specializes in adaptive clothing and is affiliated with Cégep Marie-Victorin, as well as a technology access centre (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada), and is a member of Synchronex and QuébecInnove.

Since its foundation in 2011, its mission has been to support companies and organizations in the clothing industry in developing innovative products and projects, by providing technical support, training, strategic information dissemination, and applied research. Vestechpro prioritizes the following niche research areas: smart clothing, adaptive and medical clothing, anthropometry and the circular economy.

For any questions you may have, please contact:

Helen Brunet

Strategic Development Manager

Vestechpro, Apparel Research and Innovation Center

Helen.brunet@vestechpro.com

T 514 497-4978