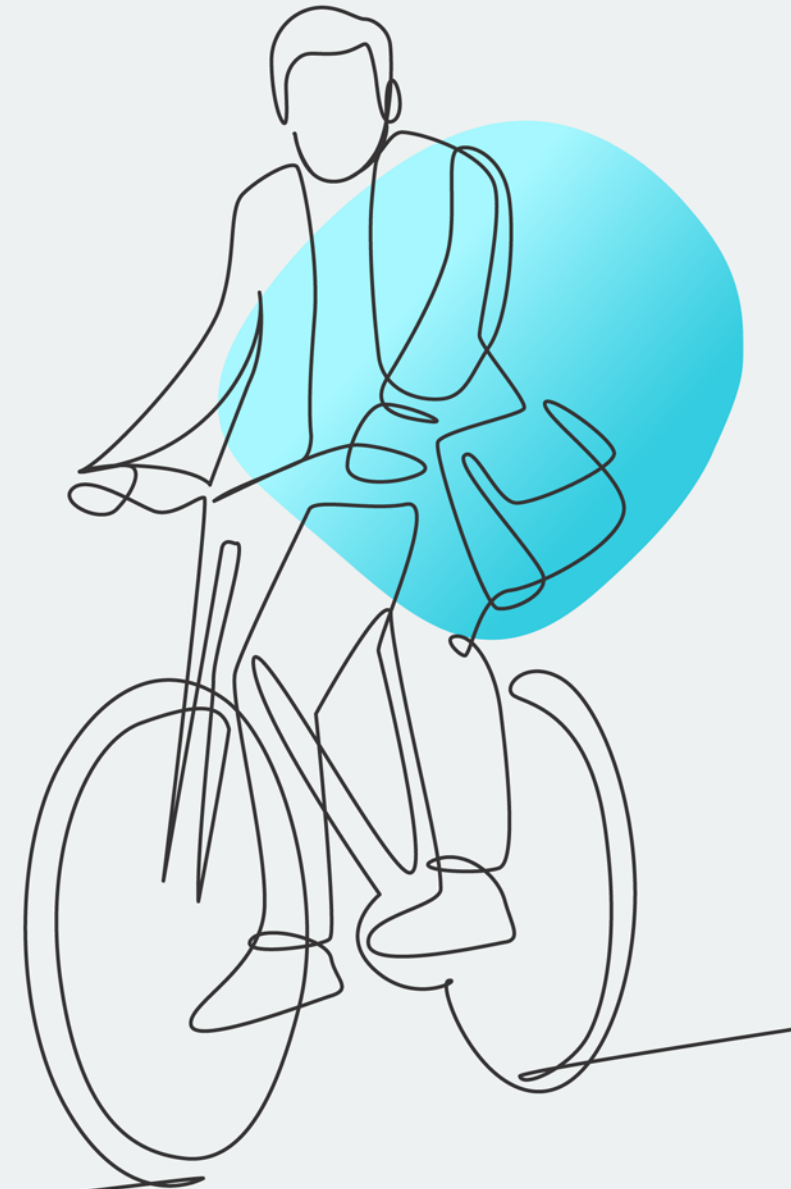




# COVID-19: Return to the workplace

**A guide for employers**

—  
May 2020



## Guiding principles

- The health, safety and wellbeing of employees is the top priority.
- Your plan should be prepared in consultation with your Human Resources or People team, including representatives from Health & Safety, Legal, and Quality & Risk Management. You may also want to consider engaging a local medical professional or an expert in the prevention of communicable disease transmission in the workplace, to review the reasonableness of your plan in light of the threat posed by COVID-19.



## Assumptions

- The COVID-19 threat will remain in the environment and represent a significant health threat until a vaccine and/or effective treatments are broadly available.
- We expect national, provincial and/or local governments (including health authorities) to establish risk levels and provide guidance regarding their requirements and approach to the easing or lifting of restrictions.
- At a minimum, organizations must build their “return” plans to ensure strict adherence with all government requirements and guidance.



## Government actions

- We expect national, provincial and/or local governments to establish risk levels so that businesses (as well as the public) can understand the current state of the COVID-19 threat.
- We expect governmental guidelines to explain when and where to lift restrictions, based on the assessed threat level at the time as well as information and guidance on how to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its citizens.



DISCLAIMER: The information contained herein is of a general nature and is not intended to address the circumstances of any particular individual or entity. Although we endeavor to provide accurate and timely information, there can be no guarantee that such information is accurate as of the date it is received or that it will continue to be accurate in the future. No one should act on such information without appropriate professional advice after a thorough examination of the particular situation.

# Four phases of responding to the COVID-19 crisis



Returning to the workplace is part of the **Recovery** phase. When organizations make decisions about longer term policies – e.g.: working from home, travel guidelines, etc. – they must ensure they look ahead to the **New Reality** phase that will emerge once a COVID-19 vaccine or treatment is found.

# Public confidence and trust is critical to the economic recovery

A comprehensive plan to safely bring people back to the workplace is essential to build public confidence and ensure the economic recovery.



# Do we need to return our workforce to the premises?

Organizations must be clear on what they want to achieve by allowing people to return to the workplace, and have completed an assessment of business benefits versus risk.

Organizations may wish to consider a phased return to work. Before executing plans, there are a number of considerations that should be addressed, including thoughts around which groups should be returning first. Considerations include:

- 1** Office operations teams / shadow teams
- 2** Risks to mental health and well-being
- 3** Unsuitable work space at home
- 4** Access to a specific workstation set-up
- 5** Impact of home working on employees' ability to learn on the job.
- 6** Additional equipment required to be able to fulfil their role
- 7** Roles that cannot operate effectively working remotely
- 8** Roles that cannot be performed in full or part outside the office
- 9** Poor internet connectivity
- 10** Employee dependence on public transport to get to an office location.

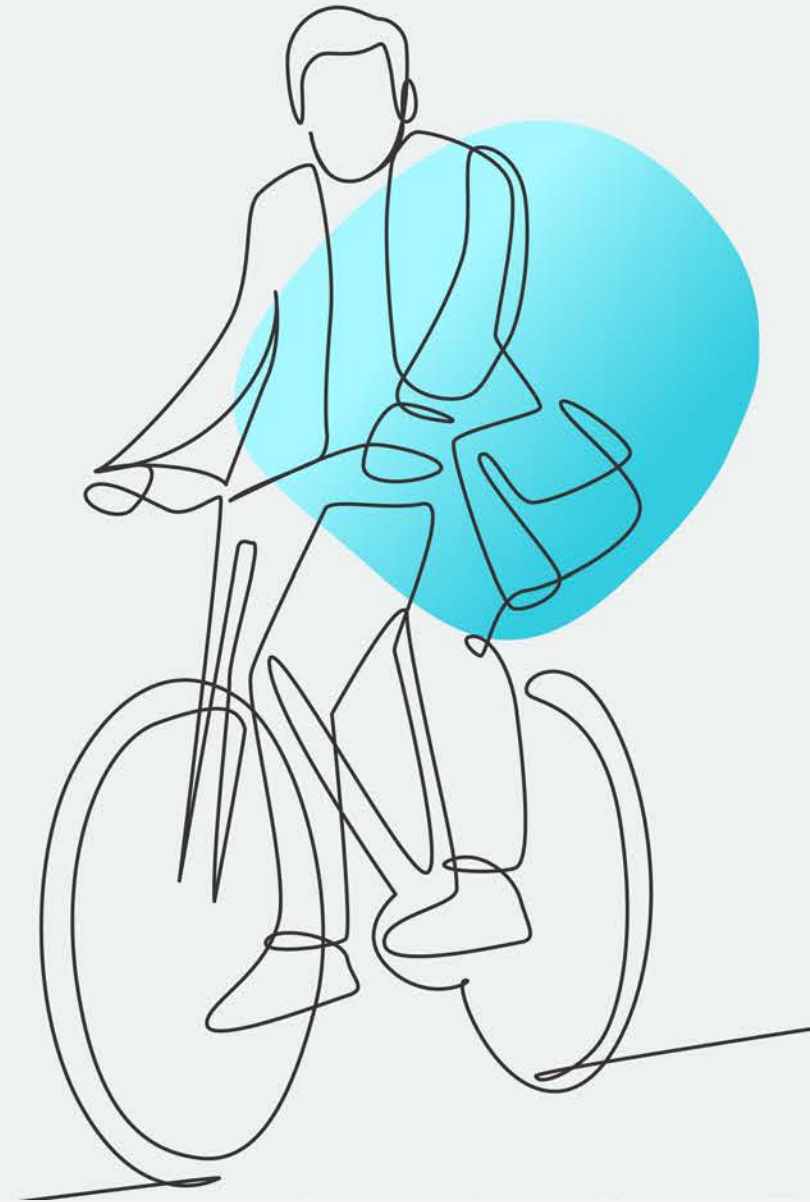
If consistent with local health authority guidance, consider giving priority access to people who have developed COVID-19 antibodies.

# Returning to the workplace

If the organization determines that a return to work is beneficial for all employees or specific groups within the workforce, it is advised to engage early with building management, brokers and insurers to confirm appropriate risk management mitigations/considerations are in place.

Organizations have a duty to first and foremost protect the health and wellbeing of their people, as well as clients and other visitors to their offices. To ensure that an orderly, efficient process is in place and ready for implementation, it is encouraged to start forming return to work plans in advance of indications that national, provincial or local government may begin easing or lifting restrictions.

Although COVID-19 is a plan, and the actions required, will differ according to applicable law. It global pandemic, it is unlikely that one global 'panacea' approach to the easing of lockdowns will materialize. The scope of the is therefore important that each organization is familiar with the applicable laws, regulations and policies that apply to the health and safety of their people, including visitors to their premises, and the unique threat posed by COVID-19, before implementing measures that attempt to mitigate the risk of people being infected and contribute to providing a safe and healthy environment in the office.

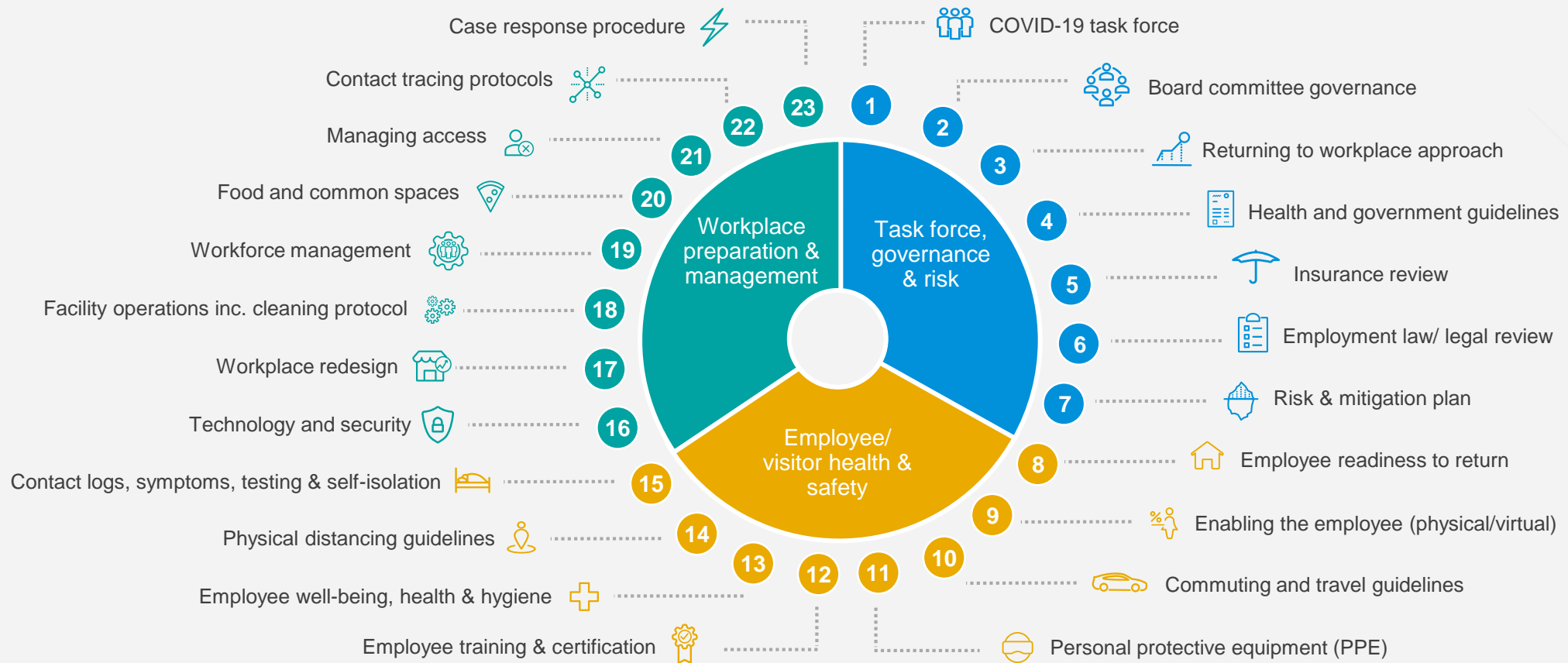


# Return to the workplace framework

Three distinct stakeholder groups need bespoke information. Bringing people back to the workplace requires coordination among these groups. It is important to design activities, procedures and content in a way that will be best consumed by each group.



# Return to the workplace framework

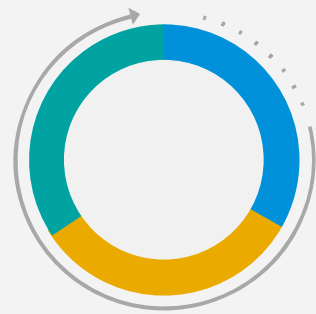


Across every iteration communication, monitoring (internal and external) and reporting are essential activities



# Completing cycles of the framework is essential for success

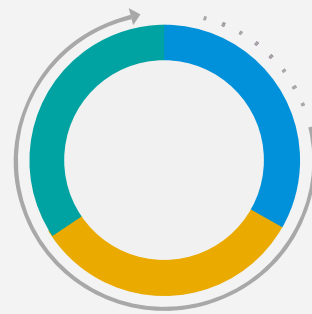
We will work with you to cycle through this framework at each stage of your Return to the Workplace journey. We will start Cycle 1 with an assessment to understand how thorough we need to be, how fast you need your people to return and your current activities to date. Based on this, we will know the depth, breadth and timelines going forward.



## 1 Current state assessment

### Key considerations:

- Understand ideal timelines to bring people back
- Understand activities to date across all areas
- Recognize critical areas and roadblocks



## 2 Plan and address gaps

### Key considerations:

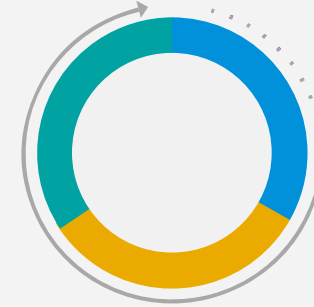
- Address gaps found in Cycle 1
- Assess whether ready to bring people back
- Develop implementation plan
- Address critical roadblocks



## 3 First wave of return

### Key considerations:

- Check if each area has been set up correctly and effectively
- Communicate effectively with all stakeholder groups
- Develop ways to monitor and report progress



## 4+ Subsequent waves of return

### Key considerations:

- Assess performance of each area
- Expand or reduce number of people in the workplace
- Understand what is working and what is not and make improvements

Across every iteration communication, monitoring (internal and external) and reporting are essential activities

# The objective is to create a plan that will...

## Allow a gradual and phased return

### **The phased return of employees to offices and client locations**

A return to the office should be gradual and is advised to occur in phases, allowing organizations to test, evaluate and adjust mitigation processes and protocols prior to reopening offices to larger numbers of returning employees and visitors.

For example, organizations may want to consider a first phase return to include employees whose functions are critical to office operations or those whose functions cannot be fully performed outside the office. A gradual, phased approach also gives those employees who have concerns about returning to the office additional time to begin to make the necessary emotional readjustments.

Should governments quickly re-implement restrictions due to a resurgence in the threat (e.g.: new community outbreak), the gradual phased approach will allow for the rapid implementation of an appropriate response.

## Mitigate the health and safety risk

### **Mitigating the health and safety risks to people, clients and community**

In their plan, organizations should include protocols to manage those employees who may be in a high risk category for exposure to COVID-19.

Refer to respective governmental health authorities to understand high risk criteria as there are varying definitions.

Assess the impact of working remotely on those who may have limited “home office” infrastructure.

Organizations may wish to postpone the return of those employees commuting on public transport whose functions can be fully performed outside the office.

# Four key mitigation measures

**1 Access controls**  
(screening) for employees,  
visitors and vendors



The following are four key mitigation measures that organizations should consider implementing once they have determined that a return to the workplace is necessary for all or part of your workforce.

**2 Physical distancing**  
(also known as social  
distancing)



These are based on guidance from government and private health authorities, including the World Health Organization (WHO), Government of Canada COVID-19 update page, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), EU Center for Disease Control (ECDC), and International SOS (ISOS), KPMG International's private global medical and security support provider.

**3 Personal protective  
equipment (PPE)**



Information from these organizations is based on what is currently known about COVID-19. Governments may issue guidance that differs from what is suggested here, and companies are advised to implement those in addition to, or instead of, these four key measures.

**4 Office cleaning  
and hygiene**



# Four key mitigation measures

## 1 Access controls (screening) for employees, visitors and vendors



The objective is to safeguard the health and safety of all those involved and avoid any risk of potential infection. Organizations should consider implementing measures to ensure that employees, visitors and vendors (e.g.: contracted support) stay home if they are not feeling well.

## 2 Physical distancing (also known as social distancing)



### Consult with building management

If your premises is leased, consult with building management to determine what procedures they propose to implement when people return to the office.

### Brief your people

Advise teams to stay at home if they are experiencing any signs of illness or if they are sharing a household or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 over the past 14 days.

## 3 Personal protective equipment (PPE)



### Temperature checks

Organizations may consider advising all groups to self-assess their physical conditions and wellbeing before returning to workplace. Should anyone at the site feel unwell and experience symptoms such as fever, promptly ensure the member is sent home and seek professional medical consultation.

### Self-affirmation

Proactively remind people to take care and be vigilant about their own health, and provide employees with confidence that protocols are in place to maintain safety measures. Organizations should consult with their legal, risk management and/or information protection group before implementing any such communication.

## 4 Office cleaning and hygiene



# Four key mitigation measures

## 1 Access controls (screening) for employees, visitors and vendors



### Access controls – sample checklist

- ✓ Consult building/office management on returning to the office and agree on a timeline.
- ✓ Work with the building/office management company on potential entry procedures, for example temperature checks; infra-red gates or temperature guns; subject to local regulation and practice; to control spread but also a visible indicator of safety.
- ✓ Develop a visitor policy and process for your premises, where applicable gain an understanding of clients' visitor policies.
- ✓ Identify a declaration process for staff and visitors to complete prior to or on entering the building
- ✓ Establish a database of all staff health, quarantine declaration status, location data and analytics (complying with local data privacy rules).
- ✓ Establish response team for confirmed cases
- ✓ Dedicate and equip isolation spaces in the office for people with symptoms and implement evacuation arrangements.
- ✓ Review all policies, arrangements and communications at least weekly

## 2 Physical distancing (also known as social distancing)



## 3 Personal protective equipment (PPE)



## 4 Office cleaning and hygiene



# Four key mitigation measures

**1 Access controls**  
(screening) for employees,  
visitors and vendors



Employees should remain a distance of 2 metres (6 feet) from others to lower the risk of contamination. Organizations should consider the physical distance between employees around the workstations and how its people move through their offices.

This includes lobbies, elevators, workspaces, conference rooms, food service areas, collaboration spaces, staircases, reception areas and even hallways. Organizations should create limits on the number of people who can frequent a particular location at one time, to include face-to-face meetings, to facilitate this physical distancing measure. Offices may need to close certain areas to reduce the risk of close contact.

**2 Physical distancing**  
(also known as social  
distancing)



Organizations should consider ways to control the number of employees who can come into the office. This may require having employees work in the office on alternate days, creating shifts, scheduled arrival and departure times, identifying those who can continue to work full-time on a remote basis, and other plans to reduce the number of employees in the office, to safely and easily enable those in the office to carry out the 2-metre requirement.

**3 Personal protective  
equipment (PPE)**



**4 Office cleaning  
and hygiene**



# Four key mitigation measures

## 1 Access controls (screening) for employees, visitors and vendors



## 2 Physical distancing (also known as social distancing)



## 3 Personal protective equipment (PPE)



## 4 Office cleaning and hygiene



## Physical distancing – sample checklist

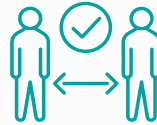
- ✓ Define 'essential workers' who cannot work remotely for business continuity purposes and identify those workers who need a specialized work station and should not be working from home for a prolonged period.
- ✓ Establish approach whereby only a percentage of employees are present on premise at the same time (with the remaining staff working remotely). Split teams and units into A, B, C teams. Develop a schedule for them to alternate presence in the office. Develop hand-over protocols.
- ✓ Establish social distancing routines in the office, such as reduced presence in the office, staggered arrival, departure and lunch times, reduced lift usage, access to meeting areas etc.
- ✓ Reduce people flow – hallways, staircases, elevator lobbies, receptions
- ✓ Ensure two-metre distant seating and spacing in wait lines and set up the office accordingly
- ✓ Develop meeting policy (e.g.: no meetings with more than 4 attendees)
- ✓ Provide safe eating arrangements in the office
- ✓ Prohibit large gatherings
- ✓ Consider the closing of collaboration spaces, training centres, cafeterias and staff rooms
- ✓ Review all policies, arrangements and communications at least weekly

# Four key mitigation measures

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**3 Personal protective  
equipment (PPE)**



**4 Office cleaning  
and hygiene**



According to health and government guidance, organizations should source and provide appropriate PPE for all employees, customers and business partners if deemed necessary and assuming it is safe to do so. This includes face masks and gloves. Health authorities have determined that some people may be infected with COVID-19, but may have no symptoms, and thus can unknowingly transmit the virus to others.

Organizations should determine what types of masks and face coverings are acceptable in their location and engage procurement staff to establish supplies to support this requirement. In certain countries where there is a shortage of masks, government advice may be that, to protect supplies to front-line health workers, the general public should not use medically-approved masks. In such circumstances organizations may choose to follow whatever alternative government guidance is provided or recommend the use of home-made masks until such time as commercial masks are readily available.

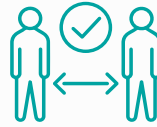


# Four key mitigation measures

**1 Access controls**  
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## PPE – Sample checklist

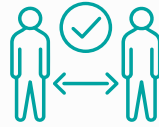
- ✓ Ensure thermometers and personal protective equipment are readily available at work sites and guidance on use is displayed in key locations.
- ✓ Consider wearing masks at work mandatory
- ✓ Understand client policy for PPE
- ✓ Emphasize wearing masks during commute or at client locations
- ✓ If applicable, procurement to identify satisfactory supply of masks for employees and visitors
- ✓ If applicable, implement guidance for fitting and wearing masks for employees and visitors
- ✓ Review all policies, arrangements and communications at least weekly

# Four key mitigation measures

## 1 Access controls (screening) for employees, visitors and vendors



## 2 Physical distancing (also known as social distancing)



## 3 Personal protective equipment (PPE)



## 4 Office cleaning and hygiene



Organizations should consider conducting a “deep clean” of all office spaces prior to reopening. Once open, firms should increase the frequency of office cleaning in high-traffic areas with a focus on elevators, door handles, tables, light switches, countertops, telephones, desks, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc. Ensure that appropriate additional measures are also taken to sanitize any office equipment or IT peripherals that are shared amongst employees.

### Organizations should:

- Ensure that staff, contractors and visitors have access to places where they can wash their hands with soap and water.
- Place ample supplies of tissues through the office along with “no touch” waste disposal bins
- Place ample supplies of hand sanitizer throughout the office
- Arrange for an external vendor to provide a deep cleanse should a case in the workplace be identified.
- Place cleaning wipes near equipment such as copiers, shared appliances, etc.

# Four key mitigation measures

## 1 Access controls (screening) for employees, visitors and vendors



## 2 Physical distancing (also known as social distancing)



## 3 Personal protective equipment (PPE)



## 4 Office cleaning and hygiene



### Office cleaning and hygiene – sample checklist

- ✓ Complete pre-entry deep clean
- ✓ Ensure that staff, contractors and visitors have access to places where they can wash their hands with soap and water and make these places visible.
- ✓ Prepare a cleaning schedule for regular workplace disinfection; monitoring, checks and additional measures are also taken to sanitize any IT and office equipment.
- ✓ Prepare a cleaning schedule for “high touch” areas to include lifts/elevators, door handles, tables, light switches, countertops, telephones, desks, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.
- ✓ Ensure wipes are available for employees to clean IT equipment, phones
- ✓ Ensure hand sanitizers are readily available
- ✓ Provide tissues and no-touch disposal bins
- ✓ Establish cleaning response team for confirmed cases
- ✓ Review all policies, arrangements and communications at least weekly

# Looking ahead to a new reality

The impact of COVID-19 led to many workforces shifting to remote working. This shift drives an accelerated roll-out and adoption of virtual collaboration tools that could have otherwise taken years.

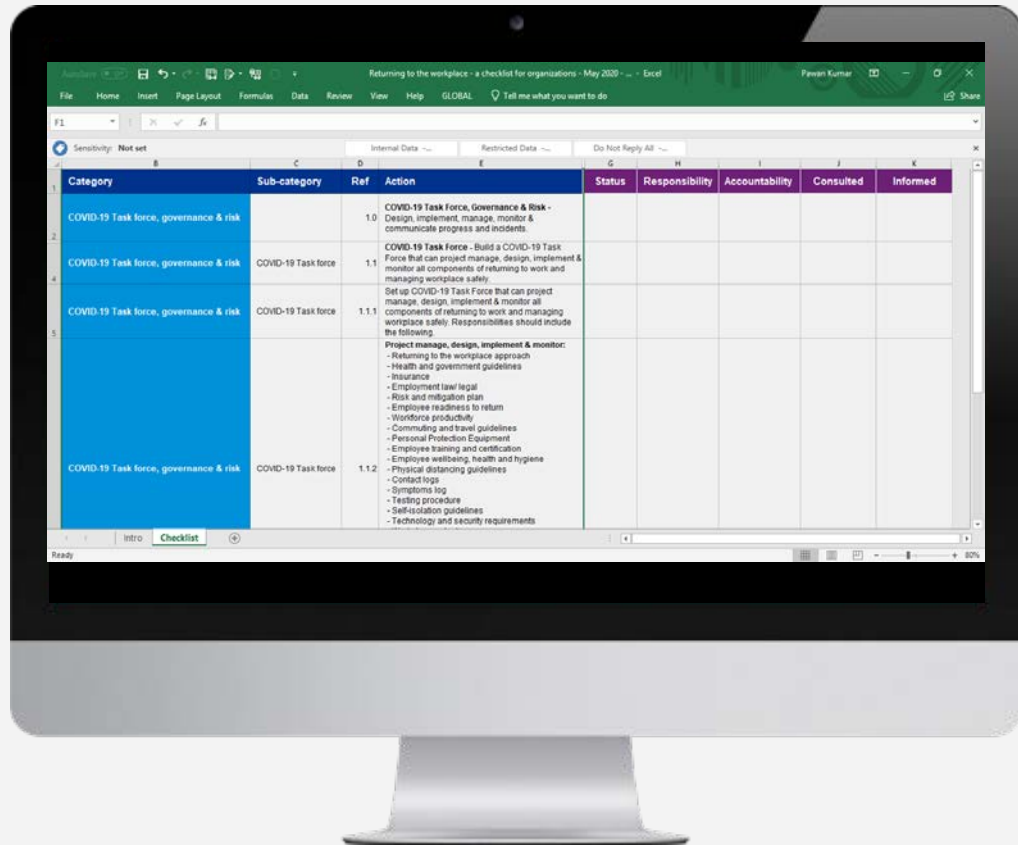
Organizations are looking closely at their digital strategies and recognize how essential these are to maintaining a remote workforce, to remain competitive, and to serve their customers in this new reality.

## Considerations for organizations:

- What will the “new reality” look like once the risk of COVID-19 subsides?
- Will workers be eager to return to the office after they have embraced remote working?
- If productivity levels have not been impacted, is the cost of real estate necessary for the organization?
- What has been the impact on the workforce and overall business performance without international travel?
- Have meetings been as productive when held virtually?
- How can the impact to the organization’s environmental and sustainability goals be sustained?

# Start building an action plan

Access a comprehensive playbook for returning safely to the workplace



## KPMG's Return to the Workplace playbook

Based on a people-centric framework, we have built a comprehensive playbook with specific actions tagged to various work environments (e.g.: industrial, office, retail) and return stages.

- ▶ Contact a local KPMG partner or [email us](#) for more information
- ▶ Visit [home.kpmg/ca/covid19](https://home.kpmg/ca/covid19) for additional resources

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