

# Covid-19



## Safety Practices for **Seafood Processing** in Nova Scotia

The following is a guide to help support the industry and to put in place guidelines to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This document was reviewed and accepted by Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education – Occupational Health and Safety Division and Nova Scotia Public Health prior to completion. Information is changing and updating frequently. We will try to keep this document updated as information is known. Please check our website for up to date information in relation to Covid-19 - <https://www.nsfsc.ca/covid-19>. Feel free to check out the Provincial website for up to date information as well - <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus>

### Understanding Risk of COVID-19 to the Seafood Processing Sector

Due to the nature of work, seafood processing plant workers tend to work in close proximity of each other. This can happen on production lines, receiving and packaging areas, sampling and quality rooms and in common areas such as lunchrooms, locker rooms, restrooms, hallways and entryways. Seafood processing plant workers need to understand the risk associated with Covid-19 and the impact it can have on their health and those they can come in contact with.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it's especially important to take steps to stay safe at work. Seafood processing plant workers need to work together to assess health and safety risks and reduce them. Employers need to define roles and responsibilities and ensure that these are communicated to employees.

The Covid-19 virus is spread by contact with an infected person or with a contaminated surface or object. The best ways to protect yourself and others from the virus are:

- Washing your hands frequently
- Cleaning frequently touched surfaces often
- Practising safe physical distancing whenever possible

### Find out if you need a COVID-19 test

Complete a [COVID-19 Self-assessment](#) if in the past 48 hours you have had, or you are currently experiencing:

Fever (i.e. chills/sweats) **OR** Cough (new or worsening)

**OR**

Two or more of the following symptoms (new or worsening):

- Sore throat
- Runny nose/nasal congestion
- Headache
- Shortness of breath

You can call 811 for assessment if you're unable to complete the COVID-19 Self-assessment online (or to speak with a nurse).

Once you complete a COVID-19 Self-assessment, the assessment lets you know if you need to be tested and you can schedule the test online.

### Assess the hazards

Assessing hazards means taking a careful look at what could harm workers in the plant. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this includes:

- addressing the risk of exposure and how to control it
- assessing how your workplace will be affected if some of your staff are absent

During a pandemic, you must do a review to identify the potential for exposure. This includes:

- reviewing tasks and jobs to determine who is at the greatest risk of exposure and when the exposure is most likely to happen
- looking again at previous hazard assessments to identify areas where the risk of exposure is greatest
- reviewing the hazard assessment, identifying new hazards, and introducing controls as needed
- reviewing and identifying potential staff shortages and how they affect operational and critical safety activities

## How you can reduce risks

Consult with your Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee or Safety Representative to discuss what you could do to reduce risk, and how effective each action would be. Consider any recommendations or Orders from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

## Eliminating hazards

Whenever possible, hazards should be eliminated. You could do this by eliminating any activity that isn't essential or can be delayed until the threat of viral exposure is reduced or resolved. This may be difficult, but you must do whatever is reasonably practical to reduce the risk.

## Engineering controls

Engineering controls either remove a hazard or provide a barrier between the worker and the hazard. Examples of engineering controls to reduce the risk of catching or spread viruses include:

- physical barriers to isolate, such as installing Plexiglas or other form of enclosure
- facility, room, and workstation design, focusing on increased spatial separation
- human traffic patterns (limiting areas where people gather or frequent)
- positioning of alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers
- positioning of dedicated hand washing sinks
- process automation to reduce contact with surfaces (like automated hand-washing dispensers, automated hand drying, automatic doors, etc.)
- ventilation
  - make sure ventilation systems are working properly
  - increase ventilation rates for makeup air, supply air, and exhaust systems
  - increase the percentage of fresh clean air that circulates into the system
  - change filters in ventilation systems more frequently
  - develop operations and maintenance procedures to clean, maintain, and operate ventilation systems including protection for maintenance staff

## Administrative controls

Administrative controls may be used in combination to protect and reduce workplace exposures. Administrative controls can include training, hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, physical distancing, alternate work arrangements, workplace cleaning, restricting workplace entry, and promotion of a vaccine when available.

Additional considerations for reducing risk of exposure include:

- revising work schedules to reduce the number of employees assigned to a given shift
- reducing close contact with customers or co-workers through the increased use of fax, telephone, and e-mail communication
- postponing business activities that require personal interaction with customers
- assigning high-risk workers (like people who are immunocompromised, over 60 years of age) to job tasks with lower risk of exposure
- increasing workplace cleaning, providing the necessary supplies, and reinforcing personal hygiene measures
- providing clean hand washing facilities
- offering alcohol-based hand sanitizers when regular handwashing facilities are not available.
- regularly cleaning objects that are touched frequently, with disinfectants or soap and water
- providing boxes of tissues and ensuring safe and sanitary disposal of used tissues
- washing work clothing more frequently.

## Employee training

Safe work procedures should be reviewed and determine if they need to be updated as a result of Covid-19. Workers may be asked to do unfamiliar job tasks which may require job specific training. All employees with potential occupational exposure should be trained on:

- the hazards associated with exposure, the potential ways of contracting the virus, and control measures to break the chain of infection
- the protocols in place to isolate and report cases or reduce exposure
- awareness of physical distancing strategies-keeping a distance of 2 metres
- appropriate control measures, such as cough etiquette (covering the nose and mouth while coughing or sneezing, coughing or sneezing into the bend of the elbow or into a tissue), and hand hygiene (washing hands or using alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available) to prevent transmission
- use and care of personal protective equipment
- Posters may be of use on OHS bulletin board or throughout the plant with reminders around personal hygiene, physical distancing, etc.
- Pre-season employee orientation should be delivered in a manner that ensures physical distancing.

## Personal Protective Equipment

Approved masks must be worn inside any public space within the plant. Mask use is strongly encouraged throughout the plant, especially when physical distancing is not possible. If approved masks are not worn, and social distancing is not possible, the employer must show what other measures are being implemented from their COVID-19 Plan to mitigate the risk of virus exposure.

Items such as masks are considered as a tool to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Employers are asked to monitor provincial guidelines regarding masks and act accordingly. Things to consider when choosing a mask for your employees:

### Choosing a mask

Non-medical masks should:

- allow for easy breathing
- fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops
- maintain their shape after washing and drying
- be changed as soon as possible if damp or dirty
- be comfortable and not require frequent adjustment
- be made of tightly woven material fabric (like cotton or linen)
- be large enough to completely (and comfortably) cover the nose and mouth without gaping
- A mask should be made of at least 2 to 3 layers of material (3 layers is best, but masks with 2 layers are still effective). Consider wearing a mask that includes a pocket to accommodate a filter or filter material like a paper towel to provide another layer.

Non-medical masks shouldn't:

- impair vision or interfere with tasks
- be made of non-breathable materials
- be made of plastic
- be secured with tape or other inappropriate materials
- be made exclusively of materials that easily fall apart, such as tissues
- be shared with others
- have exhalation valves
  - Masks with exhalation valves are not recommended, because they don't protect others from COVID-19 and don't limit the spread of the virus.

Employers are to conduct a hazard assessment to determine what personal protective equipment is necessary.

## Suggested Best Practices for Seafood Processing Plant Workers

### General Practices

Federal and Provincial Public Health are recommending the following practices:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use disposable towels to dry your hands
- Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Cough or sneeze into bend of arm and away from other individuals
- Maintain recommended minimum physical distance of 2 metres/6 feet as much as possible
- Avoid direct face-to-face interaction
- Surfaces and items in any work spaces in the plant that are touched frequently should be sanitized on a regular basis
- Avoid handling each other's personal effects (hats, gloves, clothing, kit bags, etc.)
- Do not share personal items, such as food, beverages, cigarettes, etc.
- Do not share phones, computers, and electronics unless they have been thoroughly cleaned. Refer to manufacturer recommendations before cleaning these items.
- If possible avoid staff turnover during the season to reduce the risk of infecting the other plant workers

## Workers from outside the Province and Temporary Foreign Workers

- If healthy workers enter Nova Scotia to work in seafood processing facilities, they must self-isolate for 14 days. (An exception is when they are coming in from the Atlantic Bubble – ie: New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland & Labrador). They are not allowed to work during this period. If healthy workers cross the land border to enter the province on a regular, ongoing basis they are not required to self-isolate. This would include workers that live in neighbouring provinces and commute regularly between the workplace and their home (daily or weekly). For further information on requirements please see – <https://www.nsfsc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NS-COVID-19-Self-Isolation-for-Fishery-Workers-Fact-Sheet.pdf>
- Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) are required to self-isolate for 14 days following their arrival. They are not allowed to work during this period. After the self-isolation period, employers are responsible to ensure protocols are in place and followed by TFW for both living accommodations and work activities. For further information on requirements for Temporary Foreign Workers <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Guidance-for-Temporary-Foreign-Workers-employed-in-the-Agriculture-and-Seafood-Sectors.pdf>

### Travelling to and from the Plant (carpooling)

- When possible, people should only travel in vehicles with people they live with. However, there may be circumstances where they need to carpool with co-workers to get to work. In these situations, two or more essential workers (employees in the fishing industry) can travel in the same vehicle, but should maintain physical distance as much as possible in the vehicle.
- If the only option is to go with a coworker to work, physical distance as best as possible in the vehicle (i.e. sit in the back). Try to limit the number of people in the car and space out as much as possible. Ensure that the person driving is not driving multiple people on a regular basis. This should only be done in rare circumstances.
- Wearing a non-medical mask is another way of covering your mouth and nose to prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating others or landing on surfaces. A mask can reduce the chance that others are coming into contact with your respiratory droplets, in the same way that the recommendation to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues, or cough and sneeze into your elbow, not your hand, can reduce that chance.
- It may be beneficial for employees who are carpooling together to have a letter from their employer saying who they are and where they work, just in case anyone questions them travelling together. A sample is attached.

## Plant Access Restrictions

- The only persons permitted at the facility are the seafood processing plant employees.
- Restrict non-essential visitors
- If possible eliminate person to person contact in such tasks as:
  - Fish harvesters and wharf personnel
  - Wharf personnel and trucking operations
  - Trucking and offloading personnel
  - Offloading personnel and plant operations
- Limit interaction with truck drivers by having a strategy in place before arrival. Limit number of trucks in the loading dock at one time. Practice physical distancing if possible. Consider pre communication with driver prior to deliveries. Set up an alternate sign off for any delivery confirmations, schedules deliveries, etc.
- If maintenance or a repair is necessary at the plant and cannot be carried out by the employees then only that one designated repair person is permitted at the plant and escorted by only one employee (preferably the Supervisor) while maintaining the minimum physical distance as much as possible. Once that repair person has exited the plant, all surfaces that were contacted by the person or repair equipment are to be cleaned and sanitized.

## Physical Distancing

Physical distancing of at least two metres or six feet is one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is crucial for all businesses, including those in the seafood processing sector, to make changes that will support this distancing wherever possible. The Order issued under the Health Protection Act recognizes it may not always be possible in seafood processing facilities. The risk of an employee transmitting COVID-19 to another is dependent on the distance between employees, the duration of the exposure, and the effectiveness of employee hygiene practices and sanitation. When it is impractical for employees in these settings to maintain physical distancing, effective hygiene practices must be maintained to reduce the chance of spreading the virus. When physical distancing is a challenge, the employer may want to consider the use of non-medical masks. Employers would conduct a hazard assessment to determine when/where non-medical masks would be appropriate.

All food and animal production/processing businesses should consider:

- Increasing cleaning frequency in areas where people have frequent contact with each other, or share spaces or objects
- Changing operations where possible to increase the distance between people, such as in line-ups, workstations and production lines

For more information on how to protect employees and customers, visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirusinfection/guidance-documents/risk-informed-decision-making-workplaces-businesses-covid-19-pandemic.html>

## Personal Hygiene

Frequent and proper handwashing is the best way of preventing COVID-19, and other respiratory infections or foodborne illnesses. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before and after preparing food, after handling waste, using the washroom, and whenever hands look dirty. Consider placing alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers at all entrances into work areas. Develop a schedule so that one person is assigned to inspect daily to ensure hygiene support are all functional.

### **Wearing gloves does not reduce the need for handwashing.**

Even while wearing gloves, employees must avoid touching their faces. If gloves are worn, employees must wash their hands thoroughly before putting on the gloves and must change them regularly. Employees should cover their mouths when they cough, either with a tissue or by coughing into their arm. Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. Wash linens, clothing and uniforms regularly.

## Monitoring Health of the Workers

- **Before coming to work** – employees are required to ask themselves the following questions before entering the workplace:
  - Have you been tested for COVID-19 and are awaiting results?
  - Have you tested positive for COVID-19 and are currently in self-isolation?
  - Do you have any symptoms of COVID-19?
  - Have you been in contact with anyone over the past 14 days who exhibited symptoms of COVID-19?
  - Have you been in close personal contact with anyone who has entered the province (excluding the Atlantic Bubble) within the past 14 days?
- Individuals who answer yes to any of the questions will not be permitted entry into the plant and will be advised to go home and self-monitor and self-isolate as per public health recommendations outlined at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/>
- **While at the plant** – Workers are responsible to self-monitor their health while at the plant. It is recommended that temperatures be taken twice daily and recorded for monitoring. Plant workers should notify their Supervisor immediately if they start to feel ill with symptoms of COVID-19. It is recommended they go directly home and complete the Covi-19 Self-Assessment tool online <https://811.novascotia.ca/> or phone 811
- Clean and disinfect common areas frequently that the ill plant worker may have come in contact with
- Plant workers who were in close person-to-person contact with the ill plant worker and are experiencing COVID-19 like symptoms may have been potentially exposed to the virus. Plant workers in this situation should follow the same practices as outlined as noted above.
- **Returning to Work** – do not return to work until Public Health has released you from isolation.

## Cleaning and Sanitizing/Disinfecting

Ensure that all employees that have a duty to clean have received appropriate training and any required personal protective equipment needed.

Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces and objects is important in controlling the spread of COVID-19. Any surface that people's hands touch frequently should be cleaned and disinfected at minimum twice a day, and when visibly dirty. It is recommended that sanitation check lists are followed during this time and to consider having two – one for high risk (frequently touched areas) and another for low risk (areas that are touched less often). All items used for cleaning are to be disposed of properly.

Disinfectants should be used to eliminate the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Use products with a drug identification number (DIN) and labelled as a broad-spectrum virucide A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms the disinfectant product is approved and safe for use in Canada. For a list of approved disinfectants: <https://www.canada.ca/en/healthcanada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>

## Plant Specific Areas

Seafood processing facilities have potential for close contact to occur on or near production lines, receiving and packaging areas, sampling and quality rooms, and in common facility areas such as conference rooms, lunchrooms, locker rooms, restrooms, hallways, and entryways. Avoid close contact where possible.

## Entrances, Hallways, Common Spaces and Personnel Movement in the Plant

Minimize hallway conversations and interactions and limit the number of people in these areas at a time to maintain physical distancing. The use of non-medical masks would be appropriate in these settings. Find ways to minimize common surfaces employees need to touch:

- use auto-open doors, or encourage bumping doors open with hip or using foot on kick plate
- remove door closures where possible and keep doors open to allow employees to move between doorways without touching knobs where it does not impact food safety zoning
- add foot pulls to doors with frequent traffic
- prop interior office doors open whenever possible to improve air turnover in the building, and decrease touching of knobs/handles

## Employee Clocking In/Out

- Many timeclocks have web-based features that can be operated through phone apps. Consider other apps or methods employees can use to track time and submit to supervisors.
- Use phones to clock in and out or provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer near the timeclock.
- Consider if a supervisor can use a camera from another room to clock employees in and out.
- Consider if clocking in and out can be handled by journal entry afterwards by one identified person or supervisor.

## Locker Rooms and Entering/Exiting Production Floor

- Clean and laundered clothing is not considered a risk to spread COVID-19.
- Employees should enter the Uniform/Smock/Apron area with clean hands. <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus>
- Only touch clothing you are going to wear.
- Clean and disinfect hangers on the "used" rack after every shift.
- Keep soiled Uniform/Smock/Apron separate from clean. Launder regularly.

## Common Tools

- Items that people touch frequently, such as keyboards, buttons, etc. should be cleaned and disinfected between users.
- Identify high touch surfaces (e.g., touch screens) in maintenance and receiving areas. Clean and disinfect these surfaces on a separate cleaning schedule than those surfaces in production areas to limit the chance of contamination through cleaning.
- Provide personal pens or markers or disinfect them at least once per shift.
- Identify areas where employees frequently interact and develop cleaning and disinfecting procedures specific to those areas.

## Break/Lunchroom Area

- Implement measures to minimize handling of shared food, dishes and cutlery.
- Remove shared food containers such as shared coffee cream dispensers, salt & pepper shakers, etc.)
- do not share food, unwashed eating utensils and beverage containers.
- minimize handling of multiple sets of cutlery
- practice good hand hygiene
- Make sure to include outdoor areas, tables in the cleaning schedule.
- Consider using office spaces or conference rooms to distance employees, or to create separate lunch or break areas.
- Clean refrigerator handles, sinks and faucets, microwave buttons and handles and other kitchenette areas more often.
- Have soap and disinfecting wipes easily available in lunch and breakrooms.
- Clean facilities after each break.

## Office/Clerical Work

- Limit exchange of files and paperwork to a minimum and avoid close contact.
- Separate office staff, ideally limiting offices to only one person per office space.
- Consider having as many people work from home as possible if they are not required on-site.
- Consider offering an alcohol-based hand sanitizer for people who go to the post office or bank.
- If you are delivering items to self-isolated employees at home, make sure you set up a system. Leave items on a doorstep or put the items into an already opened trunk.

## Safety Concerns

Workplaces are required to take precautions to ensure the health and safety of their employees. If you're worried about safety in the workplace, you should talk to your captain/immediate supervisor. If the situation isn't resolved, contact Occupational Health and Safety Branch at **1-800-952-2687**.

If you're the owner, manager, or supervisor and want workplace safety advice, call the Safety Branch at **1-800-952-2687**.

## Conducting a Risk Assessment

Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.

*Sources of information for this document:* Government of Nova Scotia. (2020). COVID-19 and the Food Production Industry. Retrieved from NS Environment; Government of Nova Scotia (2020). Working during Covid-19

Your Logo/Company Name

## **Carpooling Authorization Letter**

Subject: JOB CONFIRMATION - ESSENTIAL WORKERS IN THE FISHING INDUSTRY

To whom it may concern,

Following the measures of the Government of Canada that have been put in place regarding COVID-19, as well as those of Provincial Government, here is a joint letter for those employed in the Nova Scotia fishing industry (seafood processing, fish harvesting and/or aquaculture) as an essential service worker, as outlined in the Government of Canada's Guidance on Essential Services and Features in Canada during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

By this letter, I (fill in the name of Manager/Owner/Captain) confirm that (fill in the name of Employee) is employed in the fishing industry as essential services worker and requires carpooling to travel directly between home and work for work purposes.

The above named individual is part of a carpool that includes other individuals (please check):

- Same crew of a fishing vessel
- Same household
- Same processing plant

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Manager/Owner/Captain