

# COVID-19 Protocol for Temporary Foreign Workers Employed in Agriculture and Seafood Sectors

Under the authority of the Chief Medical Officer of Health

## 1.0 Introduction

In Nova Scotia, about 2000 temporary foreign workers contribute to planting and harvesting crops and to processing our agriculture and seafood products.

In recognition of their vital importance to the Canadian economy, the federal government allows temporary foreign workers to enter the country by land or air. They must meet self-isolation, testing and other [requirements](#) in the federal *Quarantine Act*. This exemption came into effect in March 2020 and has since been updated. Current information is available on the [federal government's website](#).

This guidance document for Nova Scotia provides fundamental information related to the federal and provincial requirements of employing temporary foreign workers but is not intended to replace medical or legal advice.

Updated information on COVID-19 and public health direction is available on the Nova Scotia [coronavirus website](#). As the pandemic evolves, federal and provincial requirements also evolve. Employers and temporary foreign workers are responsible to be aware of alerts and notices, including the [Order of the Chief Medical Officer of Health under the Health Protection Act](#).

## 2.0 Understanding the work environment

The federal government offers a [guide](#) for helping workplaces and businesses evaluate any unique risks involved in their operations. Nova Scotia also offers [sector specific guidance](#) to help protect workers and customers from COVID-19 in the workplace.

## 3.0 Travel to Canada

Temporary foreign workers are allowed to enter Canada by land or air. However, appropriate arrangements must be made before travel begins.

Like all travelers, temporary foreign workers are screened prior to boarding an international flight to Canada. Anyone with symptoms is not permitted to travel.

### 3.1 Arriving in a province other than Nova Scotia

International commercial flights are currently only allowed to land at four airports in Canada (Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto and Montreal). When temporary foreign workers arrive at one of these airports, they are screened for COVID-19 symptoms and tested for the virus. If they meet all travel requirements and are symptom free, workers are permitted to travel to their final destination as soon as they receive a negative test result (typically after three days).

Under the federal *Quarantine Act*, workers must isolate for a total of 14 days in Canada (see self-isolation section below) and get tested a second time during their isolation (see below). If they complete some isolation at their point of entry, the remainder of the 14 days of isolation can be done in Nova Scotia.

### 3.2 Arriving directly in Nova Scotia

As of March 18, 2021, employers are able to request to have charter flights bring temporary foreign workers directly to the Halifax Stanfield International Airport. When workers who are destined to stay in Nova Scotia arrive in Halifax, they are tested for COVID-19 at the airport, whether they have symptoms or not. This test can be done once they arrive at their quarantine site and meets the federal requirement for a COVID-19 test upon arrival in Canada.

This arrival test will be organized directly with the employer, in partnership with Perennia and the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

Under the federal *Quarantine Act*, workers must isolate for 14 days (see self-isolation section below) and get tested a second time during their isolation (see second test section below).

### 3.3 Second asymptomatic test required

Nova Scotia requires all temporary foreign workers to also get tested on day 12 of their isolation.

This testing fulfills the federal government's requirement for a second test on day 10. It applies to workers who arrive on commercial flights and then continue travel to Nova Scotia as well as to workers who arrive directly in Nova Scotia on charter flights.

This second test for workers will also be organized directly with the employer, in partnership with Perennia and the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

Any workers who develop symptoms at any time during or after their isolation period must be tested again.

### 3.4 Traveling to isolation site

If workers will be traveling outside Halifax Regional Municipality to reach their isolation location, they should be provided with a meal once they have cleared through security and testing because no stops are permitted on the way to the isolation site.

Perennia will work with employers to arrange transportation for workers from the airport to the isolation site. The follow actions are required:

- Physical distancing of at least 2 metres/6 feet between the employer/driver and the workers must be maintained at all times
- The employer/driver must wear a non-medical mask at all times
- Temporary foreign workers must:
  - wear non-medical masks at all times
  - be permitted to go to the washroom, including to wash their hands
  - be directed to the vehicle
  - put their own luggage in the vehicle
  - sit in the furthest seat(s) away from the driver in the vehicle
  - be driven directly to the isolation site
  - exit the vehicle and collect their luggage
  - be guided directly to their isolation site

### 4.0 Self-isolation

Temporary foreign workers are required to self-isolate for 14 days upon arrival in Canada. They are not allowed to work during this period. However, the 14 days of self-isolation are included in the temporary foreign workers' period of employment. That means that the employer must comply with requirements of the employer-employee relationship during that time. More information is available on [Employment and Social Development Canada's website](#).

Effective March 28, 2021, each worker must isolate in a single room, such as a hotel setting. Perennia will facilitate the assessment of the ability of commercial facilities to ensure self-isolation requirements can be met and contract appropriate facilities for the purpose of temporary foreign worker isolation. Employers can make arrangements with Perennia for the use of these facilities.

Recognizing the unplanned additional costs to the agriculture and seafood employers, expenses for meals and accommodation associated with this isolation will be covered by provincial and federal governments.

The following requirements must be met in the commercial facilities:

- Each worker must isolate in a single room with their own bathroom, unless other arrangements are approved.
- Facility staff must provide hand soap/linens in the guest rooms but they must not do daily cleaning of the rooms. Linen changes will be arranged through a drop off at the door with towels and sheets changed once per week or more often if requested.
- Cleaning supplies must be available to be delivered to individual rooms as needed. Workers must clean their rooms.
- Dirty laundry is bagged and left outside the room in the hallway as required. Clean laundry is returned the same way.
- Meals must be delivered by the facility or outside catering company to the door of each room. Dirty dishes, garbage are picked up in the hallways outside the room. Meal delivery times should be set and disposable utensils and dinnerware should be used.
- Facility staff must have minimal contact with temporary foreign workers during their 14-day isolation period. Workers must keep room doors closed to minimize any contact with staff.
- Security personnel do regular walk throughs to ensure that guests are maintaining self-isolating and not gathering in any common areas or other rooms.
- Workers will have opportunities to go outside with supervision for one hour/day for fresh air and exercise.
- Employers must have representatives conduct regular visits to the facility to respond to workers needs and to ensure that workers are abiding by self-isolation protocols.
- Employers must ensure that the health of temporary foreign workers is monitored daily during their self-isolation period (see monitoring section below).
- Workers must have access to a phone to speak with public health nurse if indicated.

## 5.0 Employee education

Upon arrival at their isolation site, all temporary foreign workers must be provided COVID-19 information and best practices training. Training must include protocols for safety measures, hygiene and physical distancing as well as health monitoring and reporting illness. Regular reminder sessions are recommended to provide updated information and reinforce best practices and ensure worker well being.

Training and education should be available in both English and the language best suited for the workers. The Public Health Agency of Canada has some materials available in several languages. They can be reached at 1-833-784-4397 or [phac.covi19.aspc@canada.ca](mailto:phac.covi19.aspc@canada.ca).

Information on [proper hand washing](#) and [COVID-19 symptoms](#) should be posted in both work and living facilities in the language most appropriate for the workers.

## 6.0 Monitoring

Employers must call workers each day to ensure they are regularly monitored for COVID-19 symptoms during the isolation period. This monitoring must take place on a daily basis and a record of the results must be maintained. Personal privacy of workers should be protected in gathering information.

Workers should be encouraged to self-monitor after the isolation period.

Anyone who experiences symptoms compatible with COVID-19 (even just one symptom) must immediately self-isolate and call 1-844-996-0694 to book a test and transportation if needed.

## 7.0 Workplace protocols

After the self-isolation period, employers are responsible to ensure protocols are in place and followed by temporary foreign workers for both living accommodations and work activities.

The federal guidelines state that temporary foreign workers should continue to follow physical distancing requirements in their living accommodations as much as possible after the isolation period. This includes beds that are at least 2 metres/6 feet apart when shared accommodations are used. Markings, curtains, or barriers should be used to ensure the distancing is maintained.

Reminders of good hygiene practices, including hand washing, must be posted in living and work locations.

Temporary foreign workers must be instructed to continue to self-monitor for symptoms and report any such symptoms immediately.

Cleaning routines must be established, including disinfecting common spaces and high touch areas at least twice daily (more frequently if needed), and work vehicles and equipment.

Employers must ensure the temporary foreign workers have access to individual personal items and, as much as possible, their own tools for work. When not possible, proper hand washing and disinfection practices must be followed.

The food sector is exempt from Nova Scotia's physical distancing requirement when necessary and from gathering requirements at work locations. However, employers must minimize work situations that require distancing of less than 2 metres/6 feet. Work hours, including breaks, should be staggered where possible to discourage workers from congregating. If working indoors and distancing cannot be maintained, non-medical masks should be worn.

Like all Nova Scotia residents, employers and temporary foreign workers are required to follow the Order of the Chief Medical Officer of Health under the *Health Protection Act* at all times.

## **8.0 Hygiene and cleaning requirements**

Practicing good hygiene (i.e., frequent hand hygiene, avoid touching face, cough/sneeze etiquette, cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces) can reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19. Employers must establish cleaning protocols during the temporary foreign workers' self-isolation period and regular work terms.

Employers are required to ensure suitable hand washing facilities or hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol are always available for workers. Hand washing must be encouraged, particularly before and after preparing or eating food, after handling waste or dirty laundry, after using the bathroom, and whenever hands appear dirty.

Hand washing with soap and water is best. This includes rubbing hands together when washing to remove dirt and germs and using disposable paper towels for drying when possible. If a reusable towel is used, it must be washed often.

If soap and water are not available for handwashing, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be used. Enough sanitizer should be used to cover the fronts and backs of both hands and between all fingers. Hands should be rubbed together until they feel dry.

All common areas and surfaces are required to be cleaned and disinfected at least twice daily or whenever visibility soiled. Examples include washrooms, vehicles, tables, light switches, and door handles. [Cleaning and sanitizing information](#) is available at on the Nova Scotia coronavirus website.

Regular household cleaners, disinfectant wipes or diluted bleach solution can be used according to the label directions. A list of [hard-surface disinfectants](#) is on the federal government website.

## **9.0 If illness develops**

If any worker becomes unwell, the employer must arrange for that worker to be isolated from all others and book a COVID-19 test by completing the [self-assessment](#). If the assessment cannot be done online, they can call 811.

The employer must have a plan to safely transport an ill employee to a primary assessment centre for testing. This includes the ill employee wearing a medical mask if available (or a non-medical mask if not) and sitting in a row of seats furthest from the driver. The driver must also wear a medical or non-medical mask.

If a worker is diagnosed with COVID-19, a plan should be in place to isolate the worker. The employer must follow any direction given by Public Health, which may include self-isolation for anyone identified as a close contact. Direction for the length of the isolation and contact management will be provided by Public Health.

They must ensure workers are provided with necessary supplies for isolating when sick and that daily monitoring of the worker is done. The employer should also inform the worker's local consulate.

## **10.0 References**

[Federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program](#)

[Federal guidance for employers of temporary foreign workers regarding COVID-19](#)

[Changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker program regarding COVID-19](#)

[Risk mitigation tool for workplaces/businesses operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[How to quarantine \(self-isolate\) at home when you may have been exposed to COVID-19 and have no symptoms](#)

[Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Nova Scotia coronavirus website](#)

[Nova Scotia COVID-19 self-assessment](#)