



**ST. FRANCIS XAVIER**  
UNIVERSITY

# COVID-19 Response Plan

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**Return to Campus — Employees**

MODIFIED JUNE 19, 2020

# Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event in the modern history of StFX. The virus has resulted in and will continue to cause changes throughout the organization. This plan is not intended to be static and will be reviewed as new information becomes available to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our employees and the StFX community.

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## Definitions\*

There are several terms used in this plan to describe guidance, rules, and laws currently in force. To avoid confusion, the terms contained herein are defined as follows:

### **DIRECTIVE**

Specific restrictions that must be followed as required by the Province of Nova Scotia, including the Nova Scotia Health Authority (Public Health) during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

### **PROTOCOL**

Steps and processes put in place by StFX to meet the Public Health directives.

### **REGULATION**

Nova Scotia government legislation in place to prescribe how to follow federal and provincial government acts.

### **SAFE OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP)**

A set of safe work practices and step-by-step instructions required in the workplace to control identified hazards to help ensure employee safety.

\*This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all definitions contained herein and is subject to change.

# Introduction

The threat of COVID-19 has been an unparalleled event in the recent history of StFX. On March 22, 2020, the Province of Nova Scotia declared a state of emergency and advised all citizens to stay home and only go out if absolutely necessary for necessities, such as food or medicine, and for work in the few essential and economically-vital workplaces that remained open. Universities in the province were asked to use discretion, follow Public Health directives, and limit activity, but were not closed. Prior to the declared state of emergency, StFX had imposed travel restrictions, self-isolation requirements and cancelled face-to-face classes. These protocols effectively emptied residences (currently there are only 32 of 1,700 students on campus), and required employees to work from home wherever possible. Work practices and shift schedules were changed to further reduce the number of employees on campus. There are approximately 60 employees who, for a variety of reasons, were not able to work from home. After contacting Human Resources (HR), and with approval from the Vice President, Finance and Administration, it was agreed they could continue to come to campus. In the ensuing weeks, other employees needed to access their offices for short periods of time to collect files or process mail and other items not possible from home. For these employees, a procedure was established where they contact the Safety and Security office to give notice, and the officers contact Facilities Management (FM) and other users of the building. These practices have worked thus far with the limited number of employees on campus.

As restrictions ease in most Canadian provinces, StFX and other Nova Scotia universities and businesses are looking to phase back to normal or new normal operations. The province launched a new website <https://novascotia.ca/reopen-ing-nova-scotia/>. The province is instructing businesses to come up with a plan to safely bring workers back. Employers and employees need to ensure work is performed safely. With COVID-19, this means several changes to work practices. The plan below outlines the changes that StFX considers reasonable, practicable and achievable. These changes must be followed by all campus employees (and contractors) for their own safety and the wellbeing of our community.

StFX will be using a phased approach to returning employees back to campus. The phased model (described herein) has been chosen not so much because of time constraints, but rather to measure the degree of success in implementing changes within a large, complex organization.

Taken together, implementing a phased return to campus will require significant changes to campus life to protect all persons at or near the workplace and work safely and in compliance with Public Health directives. A summary of these changes is outlined below in the form of StFX Protocols established to meet this end.

# Protocols

For employees to be on campus, they must follow these seven protocols, which will be expanded upon.

1. Be Symptom-free
2. Practice Diligent Hygiene
3. Maintain Physical Distancing (MPD)
4. When MPD is not possible.
5. Non-Medical Masks (NMM)
6. Limit interaction, and
7. Respect and care for yourself, your colleagues, and your community.

## **ONE: Be Symptom-free**

Anyone coming to campus must be without the symptoms noted below. StFX previously distributed a personal health check (repeated here) to all employees.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the potential risk of exposure to our workforce, please conduct this questionnaire daily (before you come to work):

1. Fever (chills, sweats)
2. New or worsening cough
3. Sore throat
4. Headache
5. Shortness of breath
6. Muscle aches
7. Sneezing
8. Nasal congestion/runny nose
9. Hoarse voice
10. Diarrhea
11. Unusual fatigue
12. Loss of smell or taste
13. Red, purple or bluish lesions on the feet, toes or fingers that do not have a clear cause
14. Anyone in your household waiting for results from a COVID 19 test.
15. Anyone in your household been asked to self isolate by a healthcare professional.
16. Anyone in your house tested positive for COVID-19.
17. Anyone in your household has travelled out of province within the last 14 days.

**If you answer YES to any of the above questions, please notify your supervisor and do not proceed to work. Please refer to the province's online 811 assessment tool found here for further information: <https://811.novascotia.ca>.**

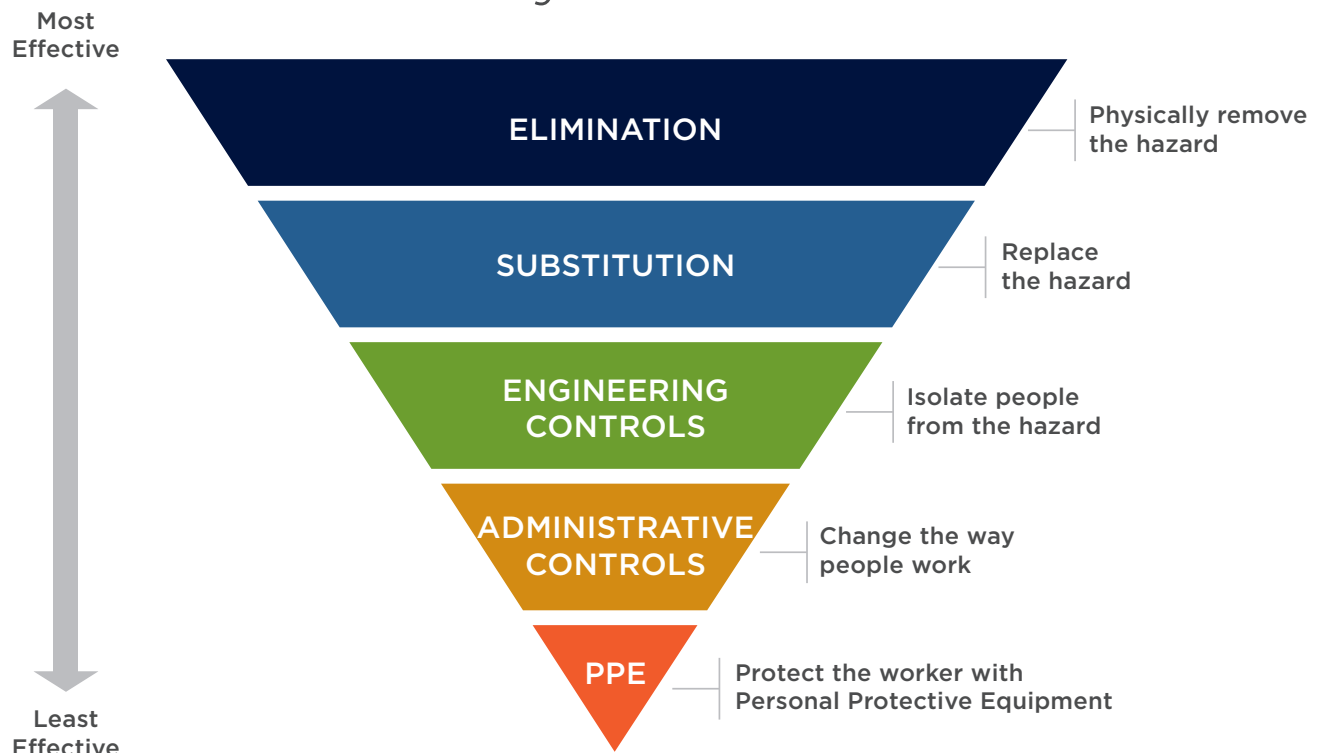
Employees shall call 811 and follow the guidance given. If they are requested to go for testing, they must contact their supervisor and inform them when the test will occur and stay home until the test result comes back negative. If the test result is positive, the employee will stay home until cleared by Public Health. The employee must communicate the test results to their supervisor. The supervisor is to notify HR, who will work with the employee and the supervisor on the appropriate return to work plan. Nova Scotia Public Health will arrange contact tracing if required.

### **TWO: Diligent Hygiene**

Employees must wash and/or sanitize their hands frequently. Hand sanitizer will be available in office buildings near common areas used for work. Employees using shared surfaces and equipment will be required to sanitize their hands prior to use (photocopier/door handle, etc.) and again after completing work in a common area. Employees will be provided wipes to use on contact areas within their office/work area. The use of sanitizers and cleaners can have a negative impact on some employees. The Office of Risk Management will work with employees to find appropriate solutions to minimize the impact and will ensure the required training is in place to use the products. Employees are reminded not to touch their faces and continue to have proper respiratory etiquette (e.g. coughing into their arm, wearing a non-medical mask (NMM), etc.)

FM custodians will clean common building space daily and will clean high contact areas (doors, washrooms) twice daily. FM will post a checklist displaying the date, time and the name of the employee who cleaned the facility.

# Hierarchy of Controls



### **THREE: Maintain Physical Distancing (MPD) of two metres from others**

Maintain Physical Distancing (MPD) of two metres from others. One of the main ways to prevent the spread of the virus is to limit close exposure to others. Everyone must maintain physical distancing of two metres whenever they can. Current Public Health directives require that all Nova Scotians follow physical distancing guidelines to help limit the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the risk of getting sick. At this time, it is appropriate to discuss the hierarchy of controls within the OHS literature. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health describes the levels as: ([www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hierarchy/default.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hierarchy/default.html))

By maintaining physical distancing, we are following a form of engineered controls. This is also true where we erect barriers between workers. Office space is a pre-constructed physical protective barrier. As part of the COVID-19 hazard assessment process, employees who share office space will have the space reviewed by their supervisor with the assistance of FM and/or Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) to see if the required physical distancing can be

maintained or if another type of engineered control can be used. Depending on the outcome of the assessment, employees may be moved from one space to another or require another form of control lower on the hierarchy as illustrated in the pictogram above.

#### **FOUR: When MPD is not possible**

When MPD is not possible and two or more workers are required to be within two metres of each other to complete a task (moving equipment, etc.), supervisors shall get pre-approval for this work through the Office of Risk Management. A hazard assessment will be performed to determine the steps required to safely perform the work. This work will be kept to a minimum and is subject to ongoing assessment. Supervisors should submit their approval request at least 24 hours in advance by completing the form found here: <http://www2.mystfx.ca/ohs/covid-19-proximity-work>. These requests will be reviewed by the Office of Risk Management, and a hazard assessment will be completed with the affected employees to ensure the most effective controls are in place, re-viewing the hierarchy order noted above.

StFX's Occupational Health & Safety Officer can assist with the creation of Safe Operating Procedures (SOP) to ensure safe work, as identified through the hazard assessment process.

#### **FIVE: Non-medical Masks (NMM)**

It has been recognized by Public Health authorities around the world that the proper use of non-medical masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Wearing such masks is considered part of our own personal preventive measures we should employ to do our part in keeping everyone safe and healthy. A mask acts as a barrier. It reduces the chance of spreading respiratory droplets to others and prevents droplets from landing on surfaces when you cough, sneeze, talk or laugh.

StFX will soon require non-medical masks be worn by all employees and visitors to campus. We will define parameters around their use in an SOP, and will train employees about their use, care, and limitations.

Non-Medical Masks (NMM) are a form of administrative controls and are not PPE. They are a preventive measure to protect those around the wearer by helping to capture the wearer's droplets and stop them from reaching other



people and commonly touched surfaces. StFX will provide NMMs to employees for use at work. The process for distributing masks is outlined in Appendix A of this plan. The SOP for their use is under development and will include specifics about when and where NMMs will be worn on the campus. This is a significant change in most people's day-to-day routine, and may require specific accommodations, and will be based on a hazard assessment of each person's work environment and duties.

### **SIX: Limit interaction**

Employees will continue to use electronic forms of communication (MS Teams, phones etc.) as the primary method of interacting. Planned meetings of colleagues where electronic communication is not possible will follow the Public Health limit on gatherings (currently 10 and under). Participants will only meet in a room where physical distancing can be maintained, and participants will be required to wear NMMs. Employees should try and limit themselves to occupying their office or lab. Employees should avoid going to other buildings on campus to avoid unnecessary face-to-face interactions. Reasonable exceptions are supervisors whose teams work in other buildings or faculty and teaching staff who deliver courses in multiple buildings.

### **SEVEN: Respect and care for yourself, your colleagues, and your community**

We have all been impacted by COVID-19 and want university operations to return to their vibrant, productive ways. To get back to a populated campus, we need to look out for each other and make the adjustments noted above. We all have personal accountability to follow these rules. All employees are encouraged to report any workplace Health and Safety concerns here: <http://www2.mystfx.ca/ohs/report-health-and-safety-concern>.

Completed reports (from the link above and available on the StFX/OHS site) will generate an email notification to the Office of Risk Management, who will work with relevant departments to resolve the concern.

Employees should report incidents of non-compliance to their supervisor and work together to complete a 'Report a Health and Safety Concern' report. Employees should not attempt to personally resolve issues related to non-compliance. Although not encouraged, concerns can be submitted confidentially by or 'by leaving blank' not completing the name and contact information fields on the form.

## Application and Orientation

To ensure the safety of all employees, StFX is requiring all Deans, Directors, and Managers to determine which faculty and staff will return to campus at each stage. These decisions will be made in consultation with faculty and staff to see what makes sense for a given department and based on the ability to successfully work from home. The supervisor will complete the Access to Campus Application form found here: <http://www2.mystfx.ca/ohs/covid-19-access-campus-application>.

All applications will be captured through Qualtrics and will be reviewed by the Vice President, Finance and Administration or his designate. This centralized review is to ensure the numbers are manageable and close to the targeted ranges.

The Office of Risk Management can assist supervisors to assess workspaces including lab or studio space. **This requirement supersedes any previous approval.** The main purpose of this assessment is to ensure the proper safeguards are in place and the employee is aware of the rules for working on campus during COVID-19.

Approved workers will be sent a link to a Moodle site where they will watch a brief COVID-19 orientation video/slide deck. At the conclusion of the video, employees will acknowledge understanding and agreement to comply with COVID-19 rules. A Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) module will be added for employees who require the training.

Researchers seeking to resume activities in StFX labs or in the field will apply using the process as outlined within the Return to Research Plan produced by the Associate Vice President, Research and Graduate Studies. Researchers and their teams will be required to follow the COVID-19 protocols within in this document.

In recognition that custodians, Safety and Security officers, tradespersons and contractors have been working throughout the pandemic, and that numerous safety protocols have been implemented for conducting their work, they are exempt from the application requirement. They will be required to comply with other stated protocols, and it will be up to the supervisors of those groups to ensure employees and contractors are aware of the new protocols.

**Compliance with directives, protocols and SOPs noted in these documents will be necessary to ensure the safety of all employees and persons at or near our workplace. Non-compliance will result in access to campus being denied and/or other disciplinary measures.**

## Phased Return

As stated earlier, the phases described below are less about specific timelines and more about success within the phase. Activities in each phase may change as new information becomes available.

### **PHASE 1:**

It is expected that Phase 1 will begin by the middle of June. The exact date will be verified when a few logistical issues are complete. Now that the protocols have been agreed to in principle via consultation with employee groups through the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC) and the COVID-19 Steering Committee, work has begun to create an orientation training slide deck and an accompanying Moodle site. A short quiz will accompany the training video. The link to the site will be sent to those who are returning in Phase 1. Reusable NMMs were ordered for employees and they are expected to be delivered by Friday June 5th. It is expected approximately 30 per cent of the workforce will return to campus in Phase 1. The exact timeline for increasing the numbers on campus will depend on the lessons learned and success of Phase 1.

### **PHASE 2:**

Continues with rules of Phase 1, but increases the number of employees approved to return to campus. The COVID-19 Steering Committee will make a recommendation to the university executive based on the performance in Phase 1. This recommendation will incorporate any changes to the Nova Scotia Public Health recommendations or rules (e.g. gathering sizes) and allow for up to 60 per cent of employees to return to campus. The same application and orientation processes as set out in Phase 1 will be used for employees returning in Phase 2. Those that applied in Phase 1 will not resubmit an application. The university executive will determine if Phase 1 is to be expanded to Phase 2.

Carry-over work in these phases will include the development of SOPs to address specific COVID-19 concerns that arise with each decrease in restrictions.

Even as the province discusses reopening, the reality is that some campus services have been ongoing. The bus service is operating out of the Keating Centre and the post office is operating with COVID-19 protections in place. The campus store is doing online business. For these and other retail-style operations, all employees and members of the public will wear the non-medical masks as per the NMM SOP. Other services regularly run on campus, but closed by the province (the daycare and the hair salon) are making plans to reopen based on the guidelines of their respective trade organizations/associations. This plan does not discuss the details of those reopening plans nor the timelines for decisions. Individual operators will be responsible to supply a reopening plan to the Director of Ancillary Services compliant with all provincial health guidelines. The plans will be reviewed by the Director of Risk Management. Any required adjustments will be communicated and incorporated into the plans prior to the operators being permitted to reopen. Other campus facilities and services will remain closed at this time until further guidance is given by the province. The reopening of other facilities will be decided upon by the university executive in consultation with the steering committee and other community stakeholders, while keeping the health and safety of employees at the forefront.

### **PHASE 3:**

Continues with the rules set out in earlier phases and includes the application from Phase 1 to be completed for those not on campus in the earlier phases. Protocols will be updated with the most current directives from Public Health. In Phase 3, most faculty and staff will have returned to campus continuing preparation for students and in-person programming. The timeline for this phase will depend on the decisions of the fall academic programming model. Employees will have training on new COVID-19 SOPs for interacting with students and/or community members. It is possible for Phase 2 and 3 to blend for some groups. This will include physical changes to service delivery locations as required to meet Public Health guidelines. All changes will be performed after a workplace hazard assessment has been done. The Office of Risk Management can assist managers with these assessments. People traffic flow within respective buildings will be reviewed and directional signage put in place as needed.

#### **PHASE 4:**

Students return to campus. In-person class and selected student programming resumes. This phase has numerous steps from strategic to tactical, and preparations will continue. Student Services and the Academic departments are working on plans for delivering programs. These plans will be shared when ready and incorporated into this document where employee interactions with students are more defined. As with other phases, changes to protocols will be done with the advisement of Nova Scotia Public Health and the Occupational Health and Safety branch of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Phase 4 will be an evolving state of partial restrictions linked to COVID-19. At some time, all restrictions will be lifted, or some will remain indefinitely.

## Testing and Tracing Protocols

Testing and tracing protocols will be developed in conjunction with Nova Scotia Public Health.

## Signage and Visual Indicators

While not specifically mentioned within each phase, a significant amount of signage will be displayed on campus. Health check notices will be posted at all entrances to all buildings and on entry way doors to all floors. A revised template listing all COVID-19 protocols will be completed and posted in numerous locations on campus and on the StFX website. In assessing workspaces, both for employees and eventually students, departments will decide on appropriate signage to assist wayfinding, foot traffic directions and waiting spots.

## Mental Health

We understand each person will have had a different experience and reaction to the pandemic, and to physical distancing and isolation measures. Employees will be provided with information about the measures we are taking to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We are committed to a safe and healthy workplace for all employees, and we will do our utmost to address any anxiety or fears that may be expressed and provide resources to employees.

## Communication

Communication with employees and other affected persons is key to the success of this reopening plan. Methods of communication will include an interactive website with current information and approval, reporting and feedback capabilities, along with regular emails and social media initiatives. Posters will also play a key role in communication of this plan.

## Appendix A: Non-Medical Masks

StFX will supply each returning employee with two reusable non-medical masks (NMM). Employees who have been approved to return to campus will obtain NMMs at a designated pick-up location.

Attached to this document is a Safe Operating Procedure (SOP) that shall be followed for NMM use on the campus.