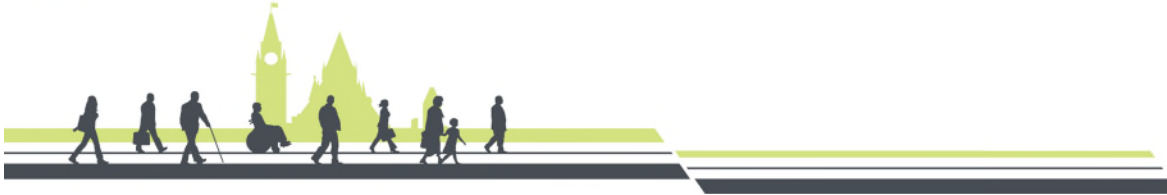




Public Services and
Procurement Canada

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PSPC Guidance and Practices for the Safe Return to Workplaces in Light of the Easing of Restrictions

Version 2.1



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Purpose

Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) is the designated custodian of general-purpose office accommodation for the Government of Canada (GC).

PSPC has developed this PSPC Guidance and Practices for the Safe Return to Workplaces in Light of the Easing of Restrictions during the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic primarily to support GC departments and agencies as the employer in their responsibility to ensure the health and safety of their employees in the workplace.

This document is intended for all client departments and agencies who occupy office space managed by PSPC real property services in crown-owned, lease-purchase, and leased facilities, specifically those clients in functional areas of workplace design and utilization.

This workplace guidance document focuses on the health and well-being of occupants as the easing of restrictions begins and the federal government resumes a percentage of occupancy in our workplaces, specifically general administrative office space. The aim is to suggest practical approaches to maintaining physical distancing and facilitating frequent cleaning, enabling employees to circulate in a healthy workplace within a safe distance from each other (minimum two metres). The recommendations in this document are intended to be short-term tactics to allow occupancy of the workplace while physical distancing is required.

This functional guidance document is subject to change. The conditions of the pandemic in Canada are fluid, and Canadian public health authorities may issue new guidance or change those currently in place. Should new considerations and information impact the guidance and recommendations contained in this document, they will be integrated. The document will be updated and shared.

It is recommended that department and agency officials stay abreast of the evolving context. Organizations should refer to and integrate recommendations and guidelines provided by public health officials as well as departmental security officers (responsible for occupational health and safety and compliance with Labour Code and other legislation) into their plans for re-occupation of physical workplaces in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This guidance was prepared by PSPC Real Property Services Workplace Solutions, its main contributors were the National Centres of Expertise for Interior Design, for Change Management and for Accommodation Management informed by global workplace industry documentation, PSPC Real Property Service Sectors and broad consultation.

The core elements of the guidance may be useful and adapted for other custodians as appropriate.

Scope

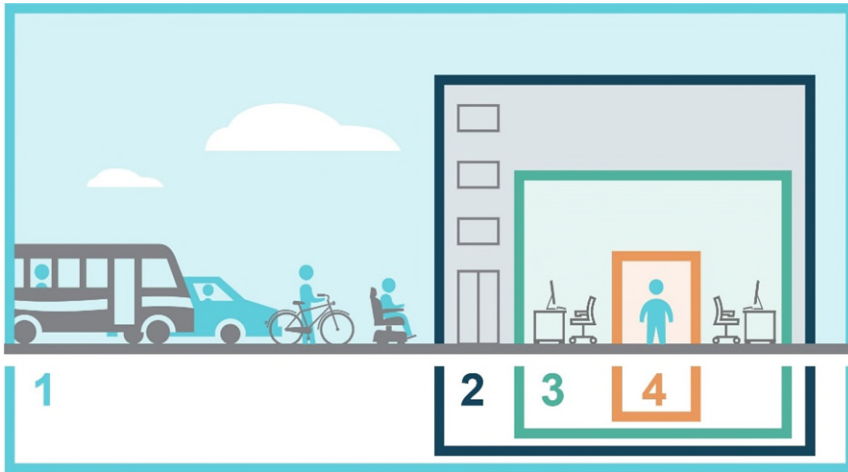


Figure 1 Scope for return

The scope for the progressive return to the workplace spans a number of levels of intervention and engagement beyond PSPC's role and spheres of influence and expertise. In broad terms,

1. Level one includes those elements outside the building, such as transportation and parking.
2. Level two includes the building and its common services and functions, such as entrances, building systems, and elevators.
3. Level three includes operational zones and office layouts which may include open and enclosed workspaces and collaborative areas, as well as support spaces such as, business centres, kitchenettes and file storage.
4. Level four includes the workforce and how they use the space, the nature of their work, activities and behaviours, work processes and tools, as well as how all these are managed

PSPC Real Property Centres of Expertise are available to provide support to departmental functional teams as they develop their approaches and determine the practices they will be adopting within their workplaces.

Departmental workplace and fit-up enquiries should be directed to the departmental Client Accommodations representative.

General enquiries on this document should be directed to the [GCworkplace](#) mailbox.

Context

On December 31, 2019, the World Health Organization was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, China. The virus did not match any other known virus. On January 7, 2020, China confirmed COVID-19. Since then, there has been a global spread of the virus which has left health professionals on high alert.

Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is working with provinces, territories, and international partners, including the World Health Organization, to actively monitor the situation. Global efforts are focused on containment of the outbreak and the prevention of further spread. PHAC is working closely with the medical community to ensure that any cases of COVID-19 occurring in Canada continue to be rapidly identified and managed in order to protect the health of Canadians.

By mid-March 2020, the Prime Minister of Canada and provincial leaders introduced social and physical distancing measures in an attempt to flatten the curve of COVID-19 spread within Canada. This meant that federal employees in non-essential services were asked to work from home.

Since that time, after several weeks of social and physical distancing measures and business and workplace shut-downs, industry and governments are looking at gradually opening up the economy, including workplaces. The federal public service is preparing its workplaces for the progressive return of employees and seeking guidance on how best to gradually balance working from home (WFH) with office presence.

Considerations

Health and safety of employees is paramount

Conditions for the return to the workplace hinge on whether employee health and safety in the workplace can be maintained through the effective implementation of Canadian public health authority measures in alignment with [Part II of the *Canada Labour Code*](#). It is expected that employees will continue to have concerns about being in office environments where physical distancing will henceforth become necessary and where maintaining high levels of cleanliness (of surfaces and high touch areas) is the norm.

Changing mindsets and behaviours

While the evolving COVID-19 pandemic has led to the immediate adoption of a ‘Work from Home’ model across most federal departments and agencies, the Government of Canada must prepare for the eventual reintegration of its workforce into its physical workplaces. This planning effort must consider opportunities for accommodating flexible workplace options, and new strategies for ensuring employee health and wellbeing throughout the process of reintegration.

For some departments and agencies, returning to their existing office set-ups may present challenges, especially since, while working from home over the last number of weeks, both employees and managers have discovered effective methods of operating remotely. These new ways of working could come in conflict with decades-old office designs that don’t consider this evolution and the resulting new mindsets and behaviours.

Flexible approach is key

Given the evolving context, a short-term, agile approach, that iterates through a review, learn, evaluate, act and adjust cycle will best serve organizations as they make their plans and consider adjustments to their workplaces. Many recommendations in this document are temporary in nature, focused on making best use of current layouts, and making minimal modifications only where required, including simply how space is used rather than permanent changes to layout or design of furniture.

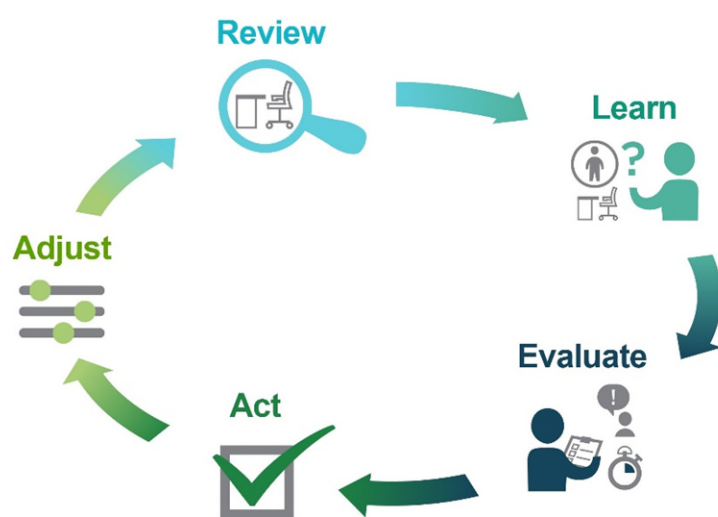


Figure 2 Cycle of review, learn, evaluate, act and adjust

The return to the workplace will be progressive, and it is expected that only a fraction of the space will be occupied at one time. Under this assumption, the space will be used differently by those who return. Attempting to make permanent changes to office layout, furniture, or design in the immediate term may be time consuming, costly, and challenging, and, given the evolving context, may also prove ineffective or unnecessary; in some cases it may negatively impact building systems, egress, and other occupant health and safety measures. The conditions of the pandemic in Canada are fluid and Canadian public health authorities may issue new guidance or change those currently in place. It is recommended that department and agency officials stay abreast of the evolving context.

It is important to note that universal design is a key principle of the design of Government of Canada workplaces, and therefore all practices pertaining to the progressive return to the office must consider accessibility and inclusivity. Any modifications or functional adaptations of the workplace must continue to ensure functionality and consider a wide range of mobility levels in addition to different manual dexterity, visual and auditory capability, and cognitive function.

Government of Canada modernization vision and goals

Over the last number of years, the Government of Canada has taken important steps to create a confident and high-performing workforce that embraces new ways of working and mobilizes the diversity of its talent to serve the nation's evolving needs. The new GCworkplace vision and objectives, supported by the 2019 Government of Canada Workplace Fit-up Standards and design principles built on the agile and digital technology-forward activity-based working model, are a big part of making that vision a reality and stand to be integral in supporting our government's ability to respond quickly and seamlessly to future events and to serve and support Canadians, continuously, reliably, and dependably.

Workplace Practices and Guidance

Overview

Healthy Workplace

While a portion of the responsibility for a healthy workplace will be addressed by PSPC and departmental facilities management (FM) practices and procedures, as well as cleaning services provided to GC offices and buildings (see [PSPC Property Management Practices for Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#)), additional responsibility for maintaining a clean workplace will fall on managers and occupants of spaces.

In order to facilitate a healthy workplace, it is recommended that organizations consider significantly reducing the amount of surfaces to clean within the office and establishing clear user etiquettes and norms to facilitate frequent cleaning and reduce the risks associated with virus presence on surfaces and high-touch areas.

There are three key areas for intervention:

1. Individual use spaces, furniture (work surfaces, drawer handles, seating), and equipment (accessories that you contact to power on or off, adjust height or proximity)
2. Common use spaces, furniture (table surfaces, seating), and equipment (accessories that you contact to connect for collaborative work)
3. Personal hygiene (frequent hand washing, avoid touching the face, and the use of hand sanitizer). Refer to PHAC [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) Guidance documents](#)

For those three key areas, organizations should:

1. Implement a cleaning protocol to ensure surfaces and tools are cleaned after usage
2. Reinforce cleaning protocols for individual and common spaces by using various methods and communication channels: signage, emails, screen pop-ups, hallway TV messages, etc.

Physical Distancing

Some recommended measures of physical distancing in federal general administrative office space will apply to common areas outside of the operational zones, such as entrances, stairwells, washrooms, elevators, and lunch rooms; other measures will apply to the office spaces themselves, where people meet, work, and eat. This guidance addresses the latter, with the [PSPC Property Management Practices for Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#) addressing the former.

When it comes to the workplace, the following areas may require intervention regarding physical distancing:

1. Individual workplace areas, including enclosed offices and workstations
2. Collaborative areas, including open and enclosed meeting areas as well as social areas \ lunch rooms that are within operational zones
3. Equipment rooms and other support spaces
4. Circulation paths and open areas

Exploring the Potential Flexibility of the Current Workplace

The Occupancy Strategy

Organizations need to have an understanding of who needs to be in the office and how they need to use the space based on function. With that understanding, an occupancy strategy should be developed. The goal of this strategy is to determine the maximum allowable occupancy of the workplace in order to respect physical distancing and help keep occupants as safe as possible. Density will most likely need to be reduced as many factors may affect this maximum allowable occupancy, such as elevator and washroom capacities and points of egress.

As a starting point, the workplace should be assessed for suitability of use as currently designed, then for potential modifications that can be implemented, which will lead to the determination of the maximum quantity of workpoints to be used at any given time. The next step would be to determine which amenities of the workplace should be made available (or restricted) and how they should be used. Every workplace is unique and each may have specific opportunities and challenges.

Current Workplace Layout and Design

Simple short-term tactics and utilization protocols in the workplace are recommended at this time to make it safe for return to the workplace without requiring physical changes to the environment. If feasible and supportive of operational

requirements, consider limiting permanent physical changes to the workplace until the long-term requirements can be thoroughly assessed.

The following are the main factors to consider when examining the current layout and design:

1. Ability to keep occupants at least six feet or two metres apart (measured from the centre point of every chair in the office or between people to ensure physical distance between occupied workspaces as well as collaborative areas)
2. Reduction of circulation congestion points
3. Reduction of circulation intersections
4. Limitation of occupancy in enclosed rooms

Every workpoint or amenity type in the workplace requires different examinations and has the potential for different utilization strategies. The following section explores each workplace amenity and provides guidance on its assessment and recommendations for use.

Workstations and Open Workpoints

Examine current workstation layout to measure all possible distances between occupants. As shown in Figures 3 and 4 below, 2m distance colour-coded circles around the blue, green and turquoise occupants overlap as they move their chairs around the workstation or as they enter and exit the workspace, making it impossible to maintain the 2m physical distance between workstation occupants.

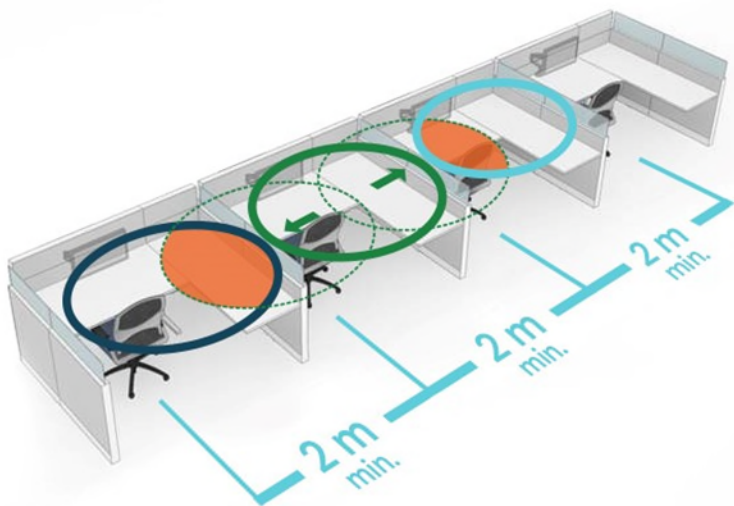


Figure 3 Row of Workstations with overlapping 2m distances depending on task chair placement

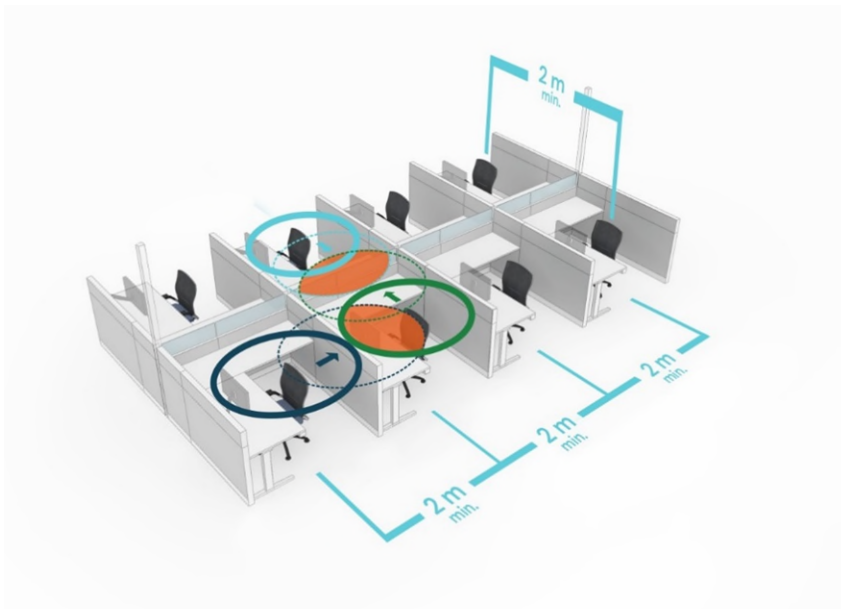


Figure 4 Row of Workstations with overlapping 2m distances depending on task chair placement

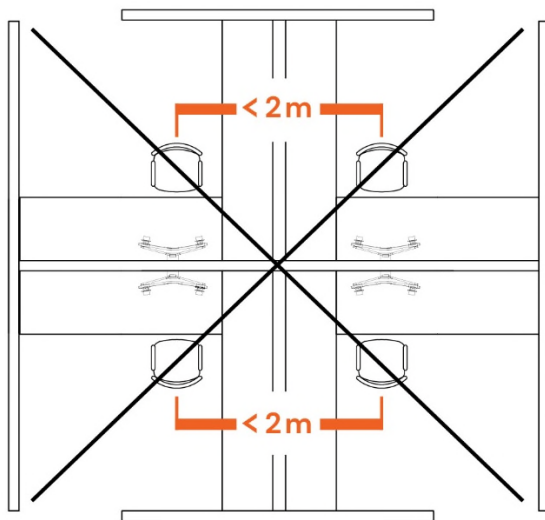


Figure 5 Workstation configuration where min 2 metre distance cannot be achieved

Many workstation configurations will not allow proper distance between adjacent occupants. Even in a large traditional cubicle layout such as is shown in Figure 5, 2 metres of separation between occupants cannot always be met. It is important to note that at this time, there is no evidence that partitions provide sufficient safety between occupants, and should not be the first line of defence.

If workstations don't have the minimum spacing of 2 metres between occupants at any point in their workspace, then a staggered seating plan is recommended. Face-to-face seating is discouraged; staggered seating can also remedy this problem.



Figure 6 Alternating seating arrangement



Figure 7 Staggered seating arrangements

The more flexibility an occupancy strategy provides, the more it will ensure that staggered seating can be easily implemented, which will maximize workspace use and leave very few unavailable for use.

The occupancy strategy should also include direction on the use of enclosed spaces, open collaborative areas, and circulation patterns.

Enclosed Offices or Other Workpoints

Users may find themselves needing to isolate in response to uneasiness or anxiety during this return to the office phase.

1. Enclosed individual spaces could be made available in order to allow all users access to a private space for respite when needed
2. Occupancy limitations should be implemented depending on the size of the room, in accordance with physical distancing protocols
3. Consider signage indicating utilization protocol



Figure 8 Enclosed room

Meeting Rooms and Open Collaborative Areas

Given that workplace occupancy will most likely be reduced, meeting room and collaborative spaces may not require as much use. Nonetheless, minor changes can be made to maximize their use and safety at this time.

1. Enclosed meeting rooms or other collaborative spaces should have reduced occupancy by removing chairs in order to maintain proper distance.
2. When employees are seated in a face-to-face manner, table surfaces—for example 36” round or 48” wide surfaces—can be used as distance indicators. When the distance is less than two metres (6’) a staggered seating approach should be used. Consider indicating table widths to inform occupants.
3. Whenever possible, doors to rooms should remain open to encourage air circulation
4. Consider indicating path of travel and dedicating some doors to entry and some to exit



Figure 9 Meeting room

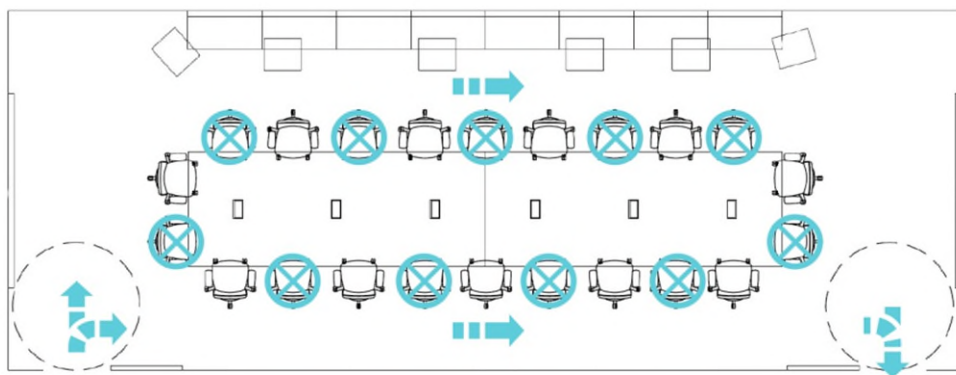


Figure 10 Meeting room plan view

Open collaborative areas should ensure proper distance between seats. This may mean the removal of seats as necessary.



Figure 11 Collaboration area

Equipment rooms, Kitchenettes and other Support Spaces

1. Re-consider the immediate requirement for microwaves/fridges. If kept operational, consider limiting access and proximity to one person at a time with indicators on the floor to mark the distance to be respected
2. Sinks and other appliances should be used by one person at a time respecting distancing at all times (marking the floors where applicable)
3. Due to their small size, consider limiting the use of equipment rooms, copiers, and printers to one person at a time
4. Consider signage indicating utilization, circulation direction, and cleaning protocols

Lockers, Coat Closets and Other Storage Areas

1. Locker areas should follow unidirectional travel (indicated with floor markers)
2. Users should refrain from accessing their locker when someone else is nearby (within two metres) and wait for access
3. Consideration should be made to prohibit the use of shared coat closets
4. Consider signage indicating utilization, circulation direction, and cleaning protocols

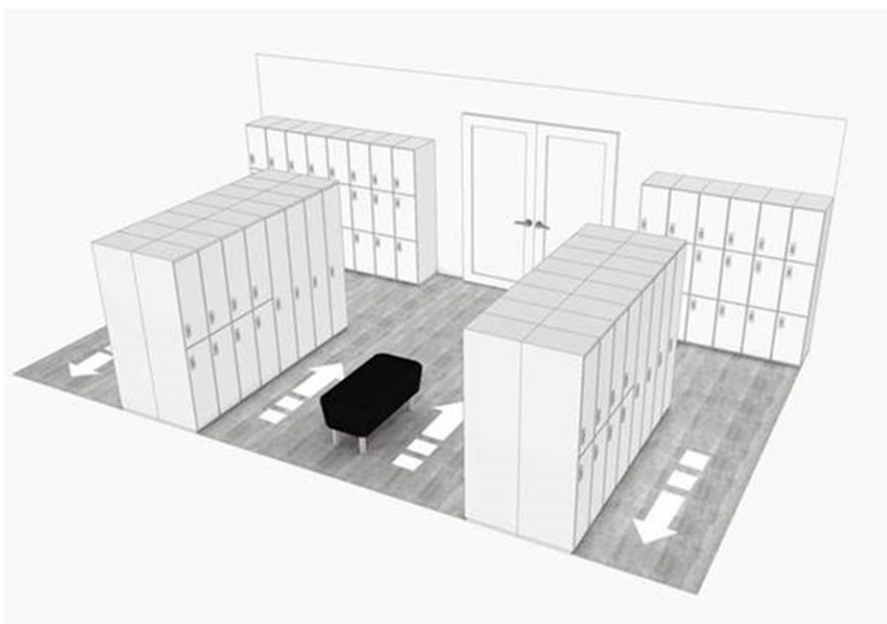


Figure 12 Locker area

Circulation Areas

1. Due to the width of circulation areas in most office environments, unidirectional circulation patterns for corridors throughout offices and workstations should be considered where possible.
2. The restriction of movement will assist with maintaining physical distance and limiting the potential spread of germs. Marking floors and providing adequate signage to reinforce the practice is recommended
3. Spaces outside meeting rooms could be marked for those waiting to enter, leaving adequate distance for people exiting and avoiding congestion points
4. Consider conducting a scan of circulation areas and flows; this will help to disencumber pathways and limit potential for bottlenecks

5. Any modifications to circulation widths or patterns should be done with consideration for accessibility requirements

The following floor plan provides an example of a staggered seating strategy across an entire floor. It indicates which workpoints shouldn't be used, modifications to use of enclosed rooms, and how to circulate in one direction (as much as possible) on the floor.

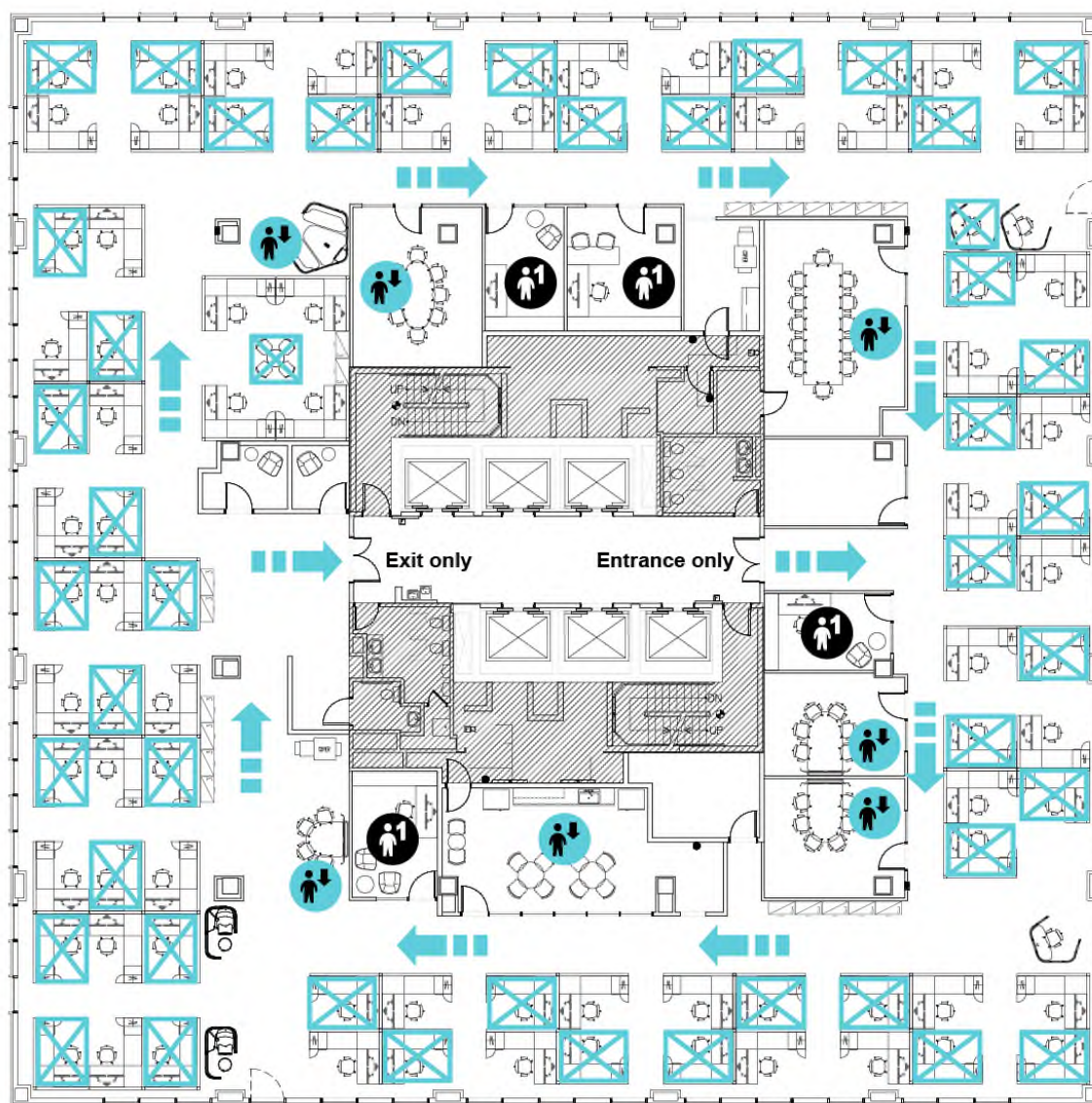
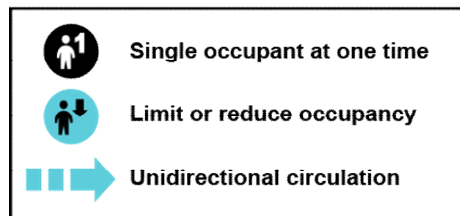


Figure 13 Example floor plan

Special Purpose Space

Although PSPC's mandate is for federal general administrative office space, many organizations may have special purpose spaces (SPS) where they need to apply similar physical distancing. When it comes to SPS, the original design was based on the space supporting a program-specific function that required specialized construction, such as fixed millwork, added security, air or temperature control, etc.

1. Special purpose spaces can include any of the following: warehouses, libraries, laboratories, records rooms, secure zones, drafting rooms, etc.
2. In order to support social and public distancing in special purpose spaces, Canadian Public Health guidance and protocols should be considered providing signage and cues outside the points of egress to the SPS and inside the space.

Consider following the guidance for specialized areas such as laboratories, libraries and courtrooms from the subject matter experts of that particular cluster within the federal government, e.g. Health Canada, Library and Archives Canada, and Courts Administration Services.

Public Contact Spaces

Employees may feel particularly vulnerable returning to workplaces that require them to interact directly with members of the public. As many grocery and retail establishments have had to adapt where there are close proximity interactions, temporary measures can be adopted to help employees safely integrate back into the workplace and to allow members of the public to safely receive required services.

1. Where a two-metre distance is not possible, like a transaction counter, it is recommended to add a visually clear barrier between the employee and members of the public, as suggested by the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety \(CCOHS\)](#). It is important to consider that additional panels in the workplace may impact air circulation and the effectiveness of the ventilation systems; these should therefore be implemented in consultation with facilities and Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) expertise.

As a custodian, PSPC has issued the following two documents (updated regularly on [GCpedia](#)) that should be referenced:

- [Building Water Systems Minimum Requirements - \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - [Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning \(HVAC\) Minimum Requirements – \(COVID-19\)](#)
2. It is recommended to temporarily remove or restrict some of the seating in public waiting areas to achieve a two-metre separation between seats
 3. The CCOHS also recommends to add two-metre markers to floors to promote distancing for any potential line-up areas

Potential Workplace Modifications and Enhancements to Support a Healthy Workplace

Once the assessment of the current workplace layout and design is complete, there may be a requirement for small adjustments or additions to the workplace in order to maximize its use and provide reassurance and guidance to occupants.

Furniture Reconfigurations

If workstations are easily reconfigurable (freestanding), it may be possible to space them out or reorient them in order to avoid face-to-face placement.

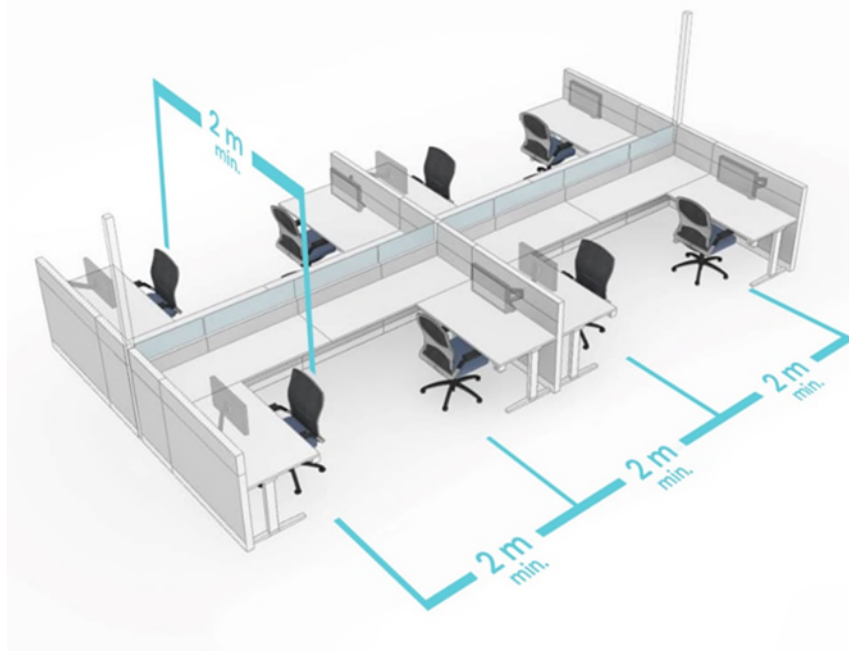


Figure 14 Example of back to back seating

Accessories

Creating physical and perceived boundaries in the workplace may help to maintain people's comfort and safety as they come back to work by providing visual cues for proper distancing. One way to achieve this is with the addition of screens and panels. Although at this time it is unclear if screens of any kind prevent the spread of infection, they can offer some level of psychological comfort to the people who occupy a space. These solutions should be applied with caution in order to not promote a false sense of safety and to consider their potential environmental impact should these items be deemed unnecessary in the future.

1. Additional privacy panels between employees are not recommended if a six-foot/two-metre distancing is possible. These are mostly required between employees and customers where there is public contact
2. It is important to consider that additional panels in the workplace may impact air circulation and the effectiveness of the ventilation systems; these should therefore be implemented in consultation with facilities and HVAC expertise. For more information on HVAC recommendations please consult [Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning \(HVAC\) Minimum Requirements – \(COVID-19\)](#)
3. Freestanding privacy screens can help delineate space and provide cues for circulation.



Figure 15 Example of privacy screen placement

*Note: these products should be added in consultation with professional and technical expertise to ensure potential egress issues are avoided and accessibility is maintained.

Signage

Consider that any design/usage modification or healthy workplace protocol put in place requires communication. Where new office etiquettes or norms are instituted, it is recommended to provide appropriate and comprehensive guidance to users via common communications channels to ensure they are aware of what is changing, what the expected behaviours are, and how these measures are intended to protect their health and wellbeing and that of others.

1. Avoid overloading messaging and consolidate messages about usage etiquette and cleanliness specific to each area.
2. Consider using available technology such as large monitors as information screens to distribute communication on how to use the space. The placement of these information screens should avoid causing congestion in circulation areas, and avoid groupings larger than five people.
3. Consider the unexpected duration of this time period and multiple changes that could occur to protect public health. Signage placement and ease of modification should be considered as well as a consistent height and location throughout the workplace in every type of space, corridor intersection, or open area.
4. Consider accessibility by ensuring a universal approach to all signage so that it conforms to applicable guidelines. Information should be made available in a diverse range of accessible formats, and using multi-lingual, culturally, and functionally appropriate language and format

Temporary Added Measures for Personal Hygiene

In order to support Canadian public health guidance and protocols, consider providing signage and cues within the workplace as reminders to employees to:

1. Wash their hands often and avoid touching their face
2. Encourage other effective hygiene practices to avoid the spread of germs such as coughing in elbows, not shaking hands, avoiding touching surfaces where not necessary.
3. Stay home if feeling unwell.

Refer to PHAC [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) Guidance documents](#)

To facilitate these practices, provide hand sanitizer stations where appropriate, especially at entrances to office areas, asking employees to sanitize their hands as they enter operational zones. Also consider these stations in areas that are furthest from the available washrooms and avoid creating bottlenecks so employees can maintain proper distancing.

Behavioural and Utilization Recommendations

While this document provides advice and guidance regarding the built environment, behavioural changes may be the most critical factor in maintaining a healthy workplace. And while the environment can be a significant catalyst for changing behaviour, the environment alone cannot keep people safe.

As part of the occupancy strategy, the following options may be explored:

1. Individual work points dedicated to daily use by any user
2. Reservation systems or strategies could be considered in order to monitor occupancy levels at all times
3. A clean desk policy could be adopted to facilitate frequent cleaning of worksurfaces
4. Encourage limited circulation throughout the workplace

In order to enable a healthy workplace in collaborative areas, consider:

1. Temporarily removing all non-essential chairs
2. Disencumbering common use areas to facilitate circulation and access by cleaning services
3. Having wipes/sanitizer available for broad and frequent use

Enquiries

Departmental workplace and fit-up enquiries should be directed to the departmental Client Accommodations representative.

General enquiries on this document should be directed to the [GCworkplace](#) mailbox.

Resources and Useful Links

[Government of Canada Workplace Fit-Up Standards](#)

[GCworkplace Design Guide](#)

[Government of Canada Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Awareness resources](#)

[Interdepartmental Community on COVID-19 \(GCpedia\)](#)

[TBS Guide for federal workspaces - Temporary signs and markings](#)