



## Introduction

This tip sheet is for employers and workers who are returning to the workplace after an easing of COVID-19 restrictions. For some, it may be their first time returning to the workplace since the start of the pandemic.

This document provides general recommendations and information about hybrid workplaces. A hybrid workplace is one that blends remote work with working at the workplace.

Please also refer to the following related tip sheets:

- [Returning to the Workplace After Easing of COVID-19 Restrictions](#)
- [Returning to the Workplace – Preparing Workers](#)
- [The Importance of Disconnecting from Work](#)

## Consider the Risks

Employers must take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of their workers. This duty includes assessing the risk of COVID-19, and other health and safety hazards in the workplace.

Use the [hierarchy of controls](#) and implement multiple measures in a layered approach. For example: screening workers and visitors, wearing masks, physical distancing, good indoor ventilation, frequent hand washing, cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, and use of physical barriers.

Monitor updates from your local public health authority and [jurisdictional health and safety regulator](#). Follow their requirements and recommendations.

## Remote Work

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented challenge that has changed the way that we work. One of the changes that occurred was that many workers were required to work remotely due to public health requirements. For example:

- [Statistic Canada](#) reported a large increase in the number of Canadians working remotely. Approximately 4.7 million Canadians who do not usually work remotely did so during the pandemic (during the week of March 22, 2020).
- The [Conference Board of Canada](#) also reported a large increase in workers working remotely during the pandemic. In nine out of ten workplaces surveyed, less than 20% of workers were working remotely before the pandemic. However, during the pandemic two-thirds of the workplaces had at least 60% of their workers working remotely (June 2020).

Remote work has [advantages and disadvantages](#) for employers and workers.

Some advantages for workers include a lack of commute, better work-life balance, higher job satisfaction and cost savings (travel, parking, and food). For employers, advantages include improved worker retention, often higher productivity, and reduced absenteeism.

However, some disadvantages of remote work for workers include loneliness, missing interactions with peers, unreliable internet, family distractions, and issues with disconnecting from work. Employers may also have concerns about maintaining morale and company culture.

## Hybrid Workplaces

[Statistics Canada](#) estimates that approximately four in ten Canadian workers are in jobs that can likely be done remotely under normal circumstances. However, this number varies significantly by industry, province/territory, income level, age, and education.



Many workers want the flexibility of continuing to work remotely. For example, in a survey conducted July 2020, only [one in five Canadian workers](#) stated that they want to return to their workplace full time once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

The hybrid workplace model combines the flexibility of working from home with the advantages provided by having workers together in a workplace.

Benefits of a hybrid workplace model include:

- Keeping many advantages of remote work such as less time commuting and higher job satisfaction.
- Providing opportunities for collaboration and innovation (e.g., brainstorming new ideas).
- Providing flexibility that helps work-life balance.
- Meeting face-to-face which may help with team building. A personal connection helps to build trust.
- Using technology to stay connected with team members when working remotely.
- Sharing ideas and information with co-workers through chance encounters when in the workplace.
- Less distractions from co-workers when working remotely.
- Renewing and creating social ties with peers especially those who are not part of your immediate team.
- Helping to retain workers.
- Ability for “drop-ins” with other team members for quick questions and discussion.
- Providing space to meet with clients.
- Potential savings in office space requirements.

Challenges of implementing a hybrid workplace model:

- Having a potentially more complicated way to organize the work week (e.g., scheduling who is at the workplace and when).
- Reconsidering the way that the workplace space is used (e.g., transitioning to more collaborative workspaces).
- Making sure everyone on the team feels included and engaged regardless of their location.
- Ensuring hybrid workers don't get passed over for new opportunities or promotions.
- Accommodating workers needs, for example workers who appreciate a fixed routine may find it difficult to switch between a home setting and a workplace, while others will wish for more flexibility.
- Inequalities related to working remotely, such as unreliable internet.

## Is the Hybrid Model Suitable for your Workplace?

Employers should consider the following when deciding whether to implement a hybrid workplace.

- Has the shift to remote work been successful?
- Can productivity goals be met while providing the flexibility of a hybrid model?
- Will a hybrid workplace help retain skilled workers?
- Does a hybrid workplace encourage collaboration?
- Will the switch to a hybrid workplace be permanent, or will there be a trial period first?

## Considerations for Implementing a Hybrid Workplace Model

- Discuss with workers how many days per week they may need to report to the workplace. It could be once a week to three or four days a week. Or, it could be a monthly schedule where the entire team is onsite for certain days to collaborate.
- Are there specific tasks or duties that need to be done at a specific location (either remotely or at the workplace)?
- Decide if any changes are required to how the workplace is used. For example, if only a portion of workers are coming into the office, then assigned seating may not be required. Instead, unassigned or flexible seating may



be preferred.

- Create policies for working on sensitive, protected or classified information when working remotely. Follow all relevant legislative requirements.
- Create a [remote work policy](#).
- Retain or enhance technology to facilitate working remotely (e.g., laptops or other devices for workers, virtual private network capacity, remote collaboration tools, etc.).
- Provide ergonomic education and resources for workers who are using a home office or unassigned workstations.
- Make sure that leaders support workers wherever they are working.
- Promote disconnecting at the end of the day as part of your corporate culture (if possible).

## Communications

- Consider whether sending worker surveys would be helpful in obtaining feedback about implementing a hybrid workplace.
- Provide information, receive feedback, and encourage discussion with all workers about the hybrid workplace.
- As some workers will be working remotely while others will be at the workplace, it's important to have the right tools in place for communication. Assess your team's needs and get the appropriate technology (e.g., instant messaging, video conferencing).
- Maintain team building efforts.

**If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a [Crisis Centre in your area](#).**



It is important that mental health resources and support are provided to all workers, including access to an employee assistance program, if available.

For further information on COVID-19, refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

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.

**Disclaimer:** As public and occupational health and safety information is changing rapidly, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.