

Best practice:

Physical distancing for our indoor office environments

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Introduction

This document has been adapted from the BC Municipal Safety Association

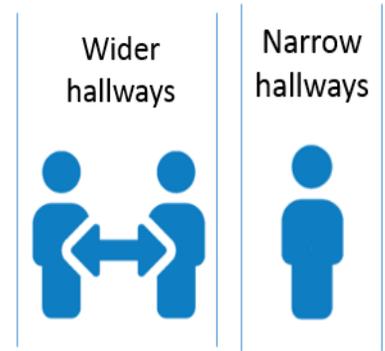
In order to decrease transmission of COVID-19 it is recommended that all Government of the Northwest Territories employees practice physical distancing while in the workplace (where possible). Physical distancing involves taking steps to change our everyday routines, the way we interact with others, and whenever possible minimize close contact with people. This means keeping two meters distance between ourselves and others ([Source: Government of Canada](#)).

Hallways, walkways and stairways

Wider hallways may allow two individuals to pass each other while maintaining physical distance. As noted above, we are to maintain approximately 2 meters distance between ourselves and others.

This means that wider hallways may accommodate two individuals even if there is not a full two meters separation, if individuals do not congregate.

To avoid congregation and congestion in hallways, conversations are encouraged to be moved to open areas (e.g. lobby, large meeting room, outdoors). Arrows or markers indicating the direction to walk can also assist with elevating congestion in addition to safety shares and discussing safety procedures with all employees.



Narrow hallways or walkways do not have enough space for two individuals to pass each other while maintaining physical distancing. If necessary, these hallways can be marked with a “1” using yellow and black floor tape, noting one person at a time.

Employees exiting workstations or offices are encouraged to pause, look both ways and then proceed into hallways or walkway. Yellow and black floor tape can be placed at the end of workstations or offices as a reminder.

In narrow hallways, where the path of two individuals cross, employees are encouraged to converse with their colleague to successfully navigate the hallway. This may mean one person backtracks to where they started or into an open area, providing the other person with the ability to pass.

If the path of two individuals cross at an “intersection” or corner, employees are asked to pause and wait for the other person to clear the area, prior to proceeding. In some situations, yellow and black floor tape can provide helpful visual cues.

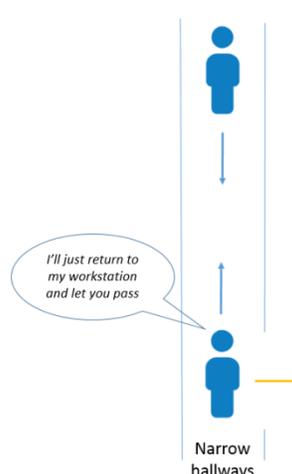
When using walkways adjacent to workstations, try to walk in a manner that provides the greatest physical distancing possible.

The use of yellow and black tape is not recommended on stairs as it may be a distraction for the eye when ascending or descending.

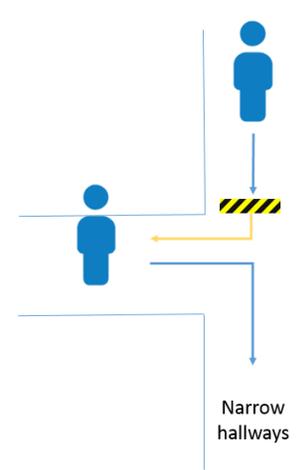
One person at a time for narrow hallways



Allow others to pass

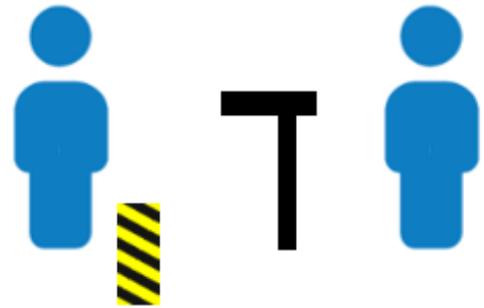


Pause at intersections and wait for others to clear the area



Transaction counters and service points

Some transaction counters and service points can operate with physical distancing and no other risk control measures, it will depend how the area is designed already. Yellow and black floor tape can provide helpful visual cues. If use of the transaction counter is required, employees may be able to maintain physical distancing by moving back, allowing the person to use the transaction counter. Verbal cues can be used to inform the person when they should approach the transaction counter.

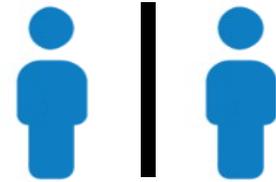


Remember that physical distancing means keeping approximately 2 meters distance between ourselves and others and that outstretched arms provide approximately this distance. This means that employees can pass lightweight items (such as paper) to others using an outstretched arm as long as the item is received with an outstretched arm. For heavier items, employees are encouraged to place the item down, step back and verbally cue the other person to pick up the item.

Some transaction counters and service points may require additional risk control measures such as transparent barriers or counter extensions. Barriers need to be wide enough to account for the normal movement of both people and safe entry and exits.

Workstations

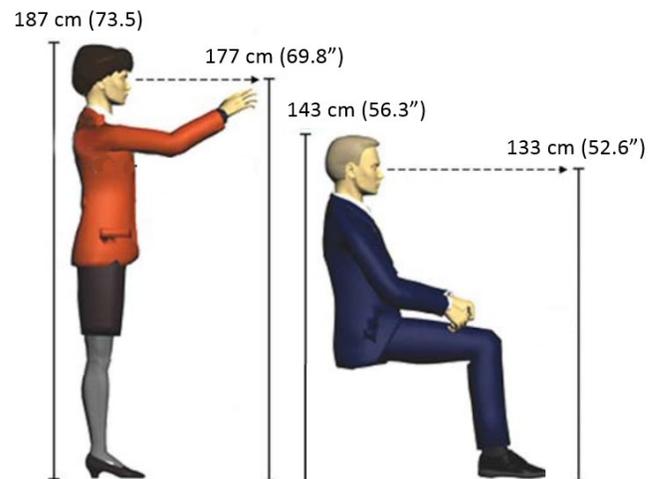
Physical distance can be measured from the head or facial area of one employee to the head or facial area of another considering the areas that they are most likely to be working in (e.g. in front of computer or in areas of desk where paperwork is completed, handled or sorted).



Less than approximately 2 meters can separate spaces if there is a partition or barrier that separates the workstations:

- If both individuals normally sit while working and there is not sufficient physical distancing, a partition or barrier between 133 cm (52.6") and 143 cm (56.3") in height is sufficient as it represents between eye height and top of head while sitting for the 95th percentile male.
- If one or both of the individuals stand(s) while working and there is not sufficient physical distancing, a partition or barrier between 177 cm (69.8") and 187 cm (73.5") in height is sufficient as it represents between eye height and top of head while standing for the 95th percentile male.

Standing and sitting height of 95th percentile male (BIFMA)



In areas where a walkway is adjacent to a workstation and where there is less than approximately 2 meters, the frequency and duration of foot traffic should be considered.

- If foot traffic is infrequent (less than 15 minutes cumulative in the day), the partition or barrier can be at the sitting height noted above.
- If foot traffic is frequent (greater than 15 minutes cumulative in the day), or if people tend to pause (e.g. to use a photocopier) or congregate, the partition or barrier should be at the standing height noted above.
- For offices location on a corner where two hallways intersect or at the end of a series of workstations, foot traffic should be considered as above when determining the partition or barrier height.
- The above takes into consideration risk information from BC Centre for Disease Control that describes walking by someone as a low risk or no risk activity.

For workstations that share a common entry point, a partition or barrier should be considered if there is less than approximately 2 meters between the entry point and the areas that employees are most likely to be working in. Yellow and black floor tape can be used to cue employees to enter using the pathway that provides the best possible physical distancing. Additionally, as discussed in the Hallways, walkways and stairways section above, employees are encouraged to converse with each other to successfully navigate the entry point. This may mean that one person slides within their workstation to allow the other person to enter. Foot traffic should be considered as above

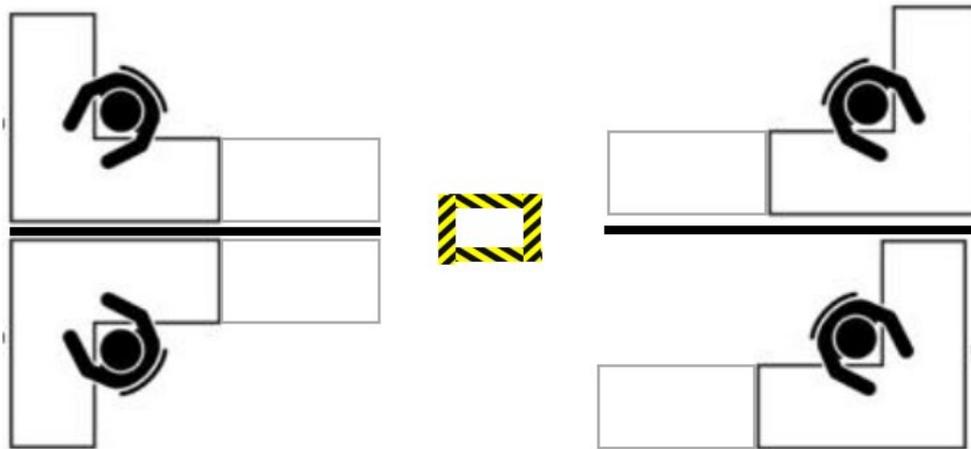
when determining the partition or barrier height. Alternately, it may be possible to reconfigure the workstations as discussed below.

Configuration of workstations

Some workstation configurations provide unique challenges for physical distancing. Below we address some of these and provide potential solutions:

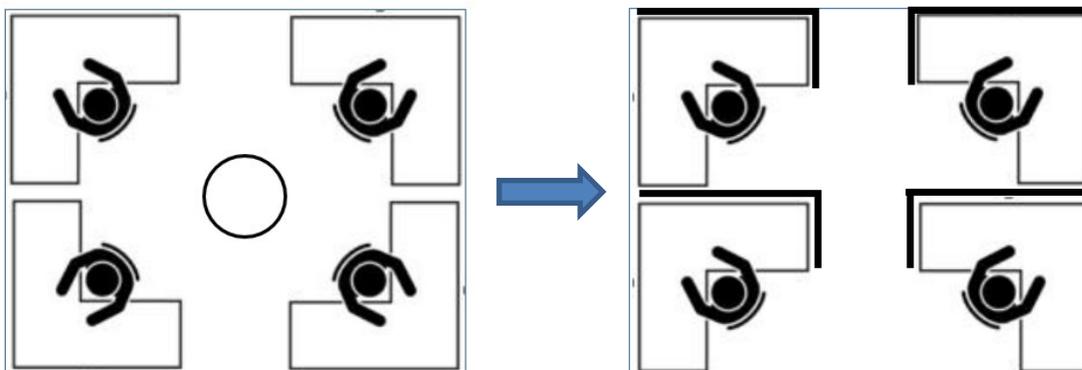
Multiple workstations in one area and the need to converse

Recommendation: Measure between workstations to determine the best place for standing. This spot can be designated by creating a box with yellow and black floor tape and be used for speaking with any of the individuals.



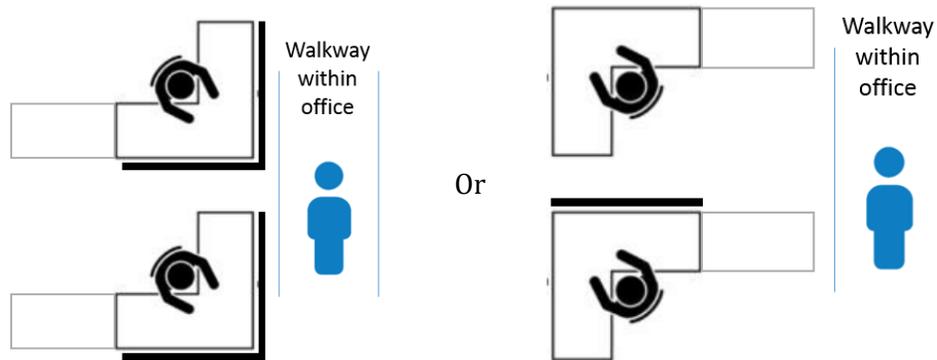
Workstations configured with open communal space in middle

Recommendation: Reconfigure furniture (if possible) to allow use of all workstations with the addition of barriers or partitions.



Workstations located near a walkway within an office

Recommendation: Add barriers or partitions to create separation. Alternately, explore to see if workstations can be re-oriented to allow more distance between walkway and the areas that are most likely used for work (e.g. in front of computer or in areas of desk where paperwork is completed, handled or sorted).



There are many other configurations and every effort should be made to use as many workstations as possible, while still adhering to physical distancing.

Options to reconfigure workstations should consider physical distancing, ergonomics, workflow, access to common areas (e.g. photocopier), phone and data access points, emergency exits and any challenges posed by the reconfiguration.

Reconfiguration could result in employees moving into different workstations or areas within the office environment. The impact on the frequency and duration of foot traffic and conversations in hallways and pathways (considering physical distancing) should always be considered.

Common areas

It may be beneficial to establish a 1-at-a-time approach for some common areas. Alternately, someone can be designated to distribute materials.

Adding yellow and black floor tape to delineate these areas can be helpful.

Having cleaning or disinfectant products close so the common area can be cleaned after use is recommended.



References used:

WorkSafeBC COVID-19 information and resources – Staying safe at work; Physical distancing section

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/health-and-safety/staying-safe-at-work>

Workers' Safety & Compensation Commission: Workplace Safety Planning for COVID-19

<https://www.wscc.nt.ca/health-safety/covid-19/forms>

WorkSafeBC COVID-19 health and safety: Designing effective barriers

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/information-sheets/covid-19-health-safety-designing-effective-barriers?lang=en&origin=s&returnurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.worksafebc.com%2Fen%2Fforms-resources%23sort%3D%2540fcomputeditemdatefield343%2520descending%26f%3Alanguage-facet%3D%5BEnglish%5D%26tags%3DCovid-19%7Ca96b6c96607345c481bb8621425ea03f>

Ergonomics and Design: A Reference Guide (2006); Openshaw, S. and Taylor, E.

<https://ehs.oregonstate.edu/sites/ehs.oregonstate.edu/files/pdf/ergo/ergonomicsanddesignreferenceguidewhitepaper.pdf>

Department of Health and Social Services: Disinfectant User Guide

<https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/en/how-use-bleach-disinfectant>

Department of Health and Social Services: Enhanced Cleaning Checklist

<https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/en/enhanced-cleaning-checklist-0>

Department of Health and Social Services: Social Distancing

<https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/en/services/social-distancing>

Government of Canada: Physical distancing: How to slow the spread of COVID-19

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/social-distancing.html>