COVID-19 and Respiratory Illness in the Workplace Measures Update

On August 13, 2021, the Province announced some of the provincial COVID-19 public health measures will continue for another six weeks, until September 27, 2021. Specifically, mandatory masking orders in publicly accessible transit, taxis and ride-shares are to continue. Also, mandatory isolation for 10 days, for those with COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test result and testing at assessment centres for any symptomatic individuals, will continue.

The City of Edmonton will maintain suitable controls to address the risks of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses in our workplaces. We continue to monitor COVID-19 and will communicate any changes if necessary.

It is important to remember that COVID-19 is only one form of respiratory illness. As an employer with a strong commitment to occupational health and safety, the City is continuing with some workplace measures initiated in response to COVID-19. This is to ensure the continued health, safety and welfare of City employees, contractors and visitors at City worksites. Reducing the risk of someone coming to work with any respiratory illness, and responding appropriately if there is an onset of symptoms during the course of the workday, can help keep the workplace safe.

Respiratory Illness: A number of different respiratory viruses can make people sick. These include viruses that circulate in the population regularly, such as seasonal influenza, and new or emerging respiratory viruses. Respiratory illnesses are typically the most contagious just before or during the initial onset of symptoms. Symptoms of flu, COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses are similar and it can be hard to tell the difference.

Key Messages:

- The safety of employees continues to be our priority.
- As an employer with a strong commitment to occupational health and safety, COVID-19 and respiratory illness workplace measures remain in place to ensure the continued health, safety and welfare of City employees and persons at City worksites.
- We will continue to monitor COVID-19 information and will communicate any updates as they arise.
- Employees returning to work in City facilities may have varying levels of comfort and emotions. Be proactive in creating a supportive work environment by demonstrating awareness, vulnerability and empathy.
- If you are not well, you are to stay home and contact your supervisor.
- The choice to be vaccinated is personal and must be respected in the workplace.
What Remains in Place for the Workplace?

- **COVID-19 and Respiratory Illness Pre-Shift Screening** - all employees are still required to perform Pre-Shift Screening before leaving for your place of work. If an employee is unwell, they are to stay home from work and contact their leader. Those experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should get tested.

- **Isolation and quarantine** - Mandatory 10 day isolation for those with COVID-19 symptoms or who have been notified of a positive test. All isolation and quarantine requirements and benefits remain the same until further notice.

- **COVID-19 vaccinations** - The City encourages employees to make an informed choice on vaccination and strongly encourages participation by all employees who are able to be vaccinated.
  - Vaccinations continue to offer the greatest protection for employees in the workplace.
  - Reminder - Do not ask a colleague whether they have been vaccinated. Model respectful workplace behaviours in any conversations about vaccines.
  - Please continue to voluntarily report when you have received the COVID-19 vaccination using the anonymous COVID-19 Vaccination Employee Intake Form. This form does not ask for an employee's name and is used for the purposes of monitoring the organization's overall rate of immunizations.

- **COVID-19 Hazard Assessment** - Leaders continue to review the COVID-19 Hazard Assessment with teams.

- **Cleaning, disinfection and personal hygiene** - Along with the regular scheduled cleaning and disinfecting protocols, each employee will wipe down their individual workspace, as well as commonly touched surfaces, and perform personal hygiene practices.

- **Addressing Respiratory Illness in the Workplace (Rapid Response)** -
  - COVID-19 - It is important to continue to respond quickly and appropriately when employees experience COVID 19 symptoms - Supervisor Toolkit.
  - Other Respiratory Illness - Discuss with the employee that they should stay home from work until symptoms have resolved and determine what the sick leave procedure is.

Suggestions As We Move Forward

- **Face Coverings / Masks** - Masks are optional in all City workplaces and vehicles (except when riding in a transit vehicle or a hazard assessment for a work area or task identifies the need). It is important to respect the choice to wear, or not wear, a mask.

- **Being mindful of others' physical distancing preferences** - It is no longer required to keep a distance of two metres (six feet) from your co-workers, however, please be courteous and maintain an appropriate distance if someone asks you to. Leaders are encouraged to continue staggering start times and breaks, as operationally feasible; to reduce the number of people in lunchrooms or other common areas.

- **Respiratory best practices** - Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose and eyes. Cough or sneeze into your elbow. Stay home if you feel sick.

- **All gatherings (including meetings and training)** - Meetings and training are permitted. Until September 20, 2021 the number of attendees must be within the 33% occupancy rate for the floor (unless a higher occupancy in the building has been approved).
  - It is recommended that you consider slowly increasing the number of attendees over the next few months, maintain as much spacing as possible, and allow virtual participation where feasible.

- **Mental Health and Wellbeing** - To help cope with this transition, we encourage everyone to consider activities that can help to reduce stress: practice mindful movements or yoga, listen to soothing music, spend time with your favorite people, go for a walk or write in a journal. For more information, go to: Wellness Resources.
FAQ

- **Is the City planning to delay the return to 100% capacity in workplaces on September 20, 2021?** At this time we are still planning for a return to workplaces on September 20th. We are actively monitoring the situation and will provide an update in early September.

- **Why are some COVID-19 controls still in effect?** As an employer, the City has a continued responsibility to ensure employees are protected in the workplace and that includes setting safety measures that are sometimes different from public health measures. Maintenance of COVID-19 controls and precautions will allow the City to rapidly respond to variants of concern and mitigate transmission in our workplace.

- **Now that in-person meetings are allowed, does that mean that I can have my entire team of 30 people together in a boardroom?** Until September 20, the meeting must be within the 33% occupancy rate for the floor and should consider spacing for attendees. It is recommended that you ease back into holding large in-person meetings. If you wish to have everyone together, consider an outdoor space.

- **If I just have a runny nose and a slight cough, can I come to work if I wear a mask?** We appreciate your dedication; however, if you are not well, you must stay home and contact your supervisor.

- **What if I am not comfortable working at a worksite with others who are not vaccinated?** There are reasons why someone may choose not to be vaccinated or be unable to receive the vaccine and everyone is entitled to privacy and understanding regarding their decision. Vaccines are one control measure to limit the spread of COVID-19. All employees are required to continue to follow workplace safety measures for pre-shift screening, cleaning and disinfecting, keep practicing good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, and stay home when sick. These practices remain important lines of defence against transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses.