



## **The Top Line**

It has been 58 days since the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic. These past 58 days have seen unprecedented change in how Canadians work, live and socialize. Polls show that social distancing and other changes have been supported by Canadians, but businesses are beginning to consider when and if the country will return to a new normal of work, travel and socializing. Governments in Canada at all levels are grappling with how to re-open their economies while heeding the advice of public health officials. Provinces are taking different approaches to this challenge, with the Federal Government looking to impose an overarching predictable framework. What follows is an overview of the various approaches being undertaken by the Federal and Provincial Governments.

## **Federal**

The Prime Minister has repeatedly signaled that Canadians will see continued degrees of social distancing until a vaccine is ready to be rolled out.

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, has said that Canada must hit 60,000 daily tests before provinces should re-open the economy, more than double the current rate of 26,000 daily tests. This caution came against the backdrop of almost all provinces announcing economic relaunch plans.

As individual provinces continued to develop their own plans to re-open, the Prime Minister came under increasing pressure to develop a Canada-wide strategy to ease social distancing protocols.

On April 28 the Prime Minister released a joint statement by First Ministers for restarting the economy. This statement agreed that as governments develop plans to gradually lift restrictions, they will ensure to focus on protecting the health of Canadians, ease restrictions gradually, protect high-risk groups, ensure public health capacity remains strong, and support a broad range of economic sectors.

After the release of these guidelines, the Prime Minister told reporters that individual provinces may still move at difference paces to re-open their economies, as each is facing a different situation with different industries in the face of COVID-19.

## **The Provinces**

### ***British Columbia***

British Columbia never ordered non-essential businesses to close, but did order certain specific sectors to close (e.g. bars and dine-in restaurants). On May 6 the Province released a plan to ease restrictions. The priorities beginning in mid-May will include rebooting parts of the health-care system that have been idle, like dental care, physiotherapy and chiropractic care, scheduled surgeries, outpatient services, diagnostic testing and imaging services. British Columbians can also expect the return of services like hair salons, retail stores, museums, libraries, restaurants, pubs, office-based workplaces, transit, sports leagues and child care. Different sectors will, however, be expected to submit industry-specific plans for reopening.

### ***Alberta***

On April 30 the Province issued a plan to move forward with re-opening, beginning with the resumption of non-urgent surgeries and health care services such as dentists on May 4. To move to the next stage, the Province will first put several safeguards in place, such as enhancing COVID-19 testing capacity, robust contact training, and rules and guidance for transit. As such, as early as May 14, Stage 1 will see the opening of retail businesses like clothing and book stores, some personal services such as barber shops, restaurants at 50% capacity, and additional outdoor recreation. Gatherings of more than 15 people, as well as arts and culture festivals and major sporting events will remain closed.

The timing of Stages 2 and 3 will depend on the success of Stage 1, as well as the capacity of the health-care system, but will see further businesses open with some restrictions still in place.

### ***Saskatchewan***

On April 23 Saskatchewan became the first Province to release a re-opening plan with Re-Open Saskatchewan. The plan includes five phases to gradually re-open businesses and services beginning May 4. The first to open are medical services and perceived “low-risk” outdoor recreational activities, with retail businesses, such as travel agencies, supply shops, clothing stores, and gift and book stores to follow on May 19. During these two phases there will be a maximum of 10 persons for private and public gatherings.

Dates for the third, fourth and fifth phases of the re-opening plan are yet to be determined, but will be based on an ongoing evaluation of the transmission patterns of COVID-19 in the Province.

### ***Manitoba***

On April 29 Premier Brian Palliser announced what is currently the most aggressive re-opening plan. On May 4 Manitoba began phase one of its two-phase plan, with medical practices, retail stores and restaurants (those that offer patio and walk-up services) re-opening. The second phase, expected to begin no earlier than June 1, will continue to expand public gatherings and open additional personal services such as nail salons, in addition to restaurants for dine-in services.

### ***Ontario***

On April 24 Premier Doug Ford unveiled the framework for re-opening the Province. This gradual, three-stage framework has no concrete dates and will only progress according to criteria which includes a consistent two-to-four week decrease in the number of new daily COVID-19 cases. Only in the third and final stage will Ontario consider opening all workplaces, while the first two stages are focused on relaxing guidelines to allow essential gatherings (such as funerals), allow non-urgent surgeries, and open more public spaces.

In anticipation of different sectors re-opening, on April 30 the Province released 61 sector-specific workplace safety guidelines, including for retail, offices, food, construction and more. Some restrictions were lifted on May 4 and more were announced on May 6. Under the latest announcement, garden centres and nurseries can allow customers to enter on May 8; hardware and

safety supply stores can open to customers on May 9; and non-essential retailers can open for curbside pickup on May 11. All these come with the caveat that businesses follow strict measures like physical distancing, sanitizing surfaces and encouraging contactless payment.

### ***Quebec***

Quebec, the hardest hit of all the provinces, has announced a gradual re-opening of the economy throughout May. The approach involves opening different parts of the Province at different times. Starting May 4, schools and most stores outside of Montreal were able to open.

Manufacturing (with restrictions on capacity) and construction re-open starting on May 11. The re-opening date for many commercial retail businesses (excluding indoor shopping malls) in the Montreal region is May 18. Capacity restrictions on manufacturing are expected to lift May 25.

Subsequent stages will be announced gradually and will include a greater variety of businesses, such as personal care services, and dine-in restaurants. However, the Province has issued a temporary ban on all events and large gatherings until August 31.

### ***New Brunswick***

New Brunswick has announced a tentative timeline for return to normal, with the gradual re-opening of businesses and activities being guided by five distinct public health alerts: Red, Orange, Peach, Yellow and Green. The Province has announced that it is in the first stage of reopening, with an “Orange” alert level in place. Effective immediately, New Brunswick is allowing households to choose one other family to spend time with. The Province is also opening up golf courses, driving ranges, fishing and hunting, and outdoor spaces, and allowing access to campuses, among other things. Travel restrictions remain in place for outside visitors at this stage. The three subsequent stages will be announced gradually, though on May 6 the Premier told businesses to get ready because re-opening is “days away.”

### ***Prince Edward Island***

Under the “Renew P.E.I. Together” approach, the Province’s re-opening plan began on May 1. Phase 1 of the plan will only allow recreational activities (such as walking, golfing and fishing) and gatherings of no more than five people. Additionally, the Province will allow for the re-opening of select outdoor and construction services, including roads and indoor projects. The second stage, set to begin May 22, will increase the size of allowed gatherings to 10, and see many retail and other businesses open (such as personal services, greenhouses and remaining construction and repair services), while the third stage, set for June 12, will see further relaxing of restrictions on restaurants and recreation.

### ***Nova Scotia***

Nova Scotia has not yet announced a comprehensive plan, but on May 1 eased some restrictions, re-opening parks and trails and allowing garden centres nurseries and similar businesses to open.

### ***Newfoundland and Labrador***

On April 30, the Government released its plan entitled A Foundation for Living with COVID-19, including five alert levels. Depending on which level the Province is in, social distancing restrictions will be relaxed, but the Province currently remains in Alert Level 5. On May 11, the Province will seek to move to Alert Level 4, which includes the opening of municipal parks, recreational activities such as angling and hunting, as well as allowing professional services (such as accounting firms) to offer in-person services.

## **What This Means for You**

Continued uncertainty will be the norm for the next several months. While all jurisdictions indicate a preference for a slow and measured re-opening of the economy, if cases of COVID-19 begin to rise again, you can expect provinces to backtrack and close down more vulnerable pressure points where required. For example, Quebec already pushed back retail openings in Montreal by a week.

Lifting restrictions on some key sectors is still a large question mark, most notably for hospitality, events and tourism. Some provinces are still restricting in-bound travel and most have no timeline for things like concerts and sporting events. Additionally, social distancing requirements can be expected to cause a fundamental shift in certain workplaces, such as retail and restaurant. Many of the provinces are recommending that work-from-home policies continue if possible.

Finally, government attention has already begun to shift towards incentivizing labour in certain sectors most hit by the pandemic, including agriculture and agri-food. Some sectors, such as long-term care, will see stringent social distancing restrictions for much longer, while requests for personal protective equipment will likely increase with the return of economic activity.

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