

May 22: Update from Deputy Minister Jody Thomas on Business Resumption Planning

May 22, 2020 - Defence Stories



i This message is intended for DND civilian employees as an update to the Deputy Minister's direction provided 1 May 2020.

Please visit the Defence Team Covid-19 website for the latest information pertinent to both civilian and military Defence Team members

Team,

You want to know when we will resume business activities and what that will look like. Here is best answer I can give you right now.

THE SHORT ANSWER

In no way making light of this difficult situation, the answer is "it depends". But as Deputy Minister, I have no expectation that all of you will be back in your regular places of work on 1 June. Some of you **may be** but a great number of factors must be considered, communication will have occurred, and safety measures will have been put in place before that happens.

THE LONG ANSWER

In broad strokes, the process of business resumption—with some of us working remotely, and others working on a DND site—will roll out like this:

Over the next several weeks, L1s across the Defence Team will explain to their staff in greater detail how—and when—your different areas of operations will resume a more familiar state of business.

As a Defence Team civilian, your personal resumption-of-business timing will be influenced by a variety of factors, including (but not limited to):

- the public health conditions in your part of the country;
- the type of work you do on the Defence Team;
- your work location's readiness to accommodate workers in a safe way;
- whether your work needs to take place on a DND/CAF premises, or whether remote work is possible;
- your health; and
- your personal situation, especially as it relates to COVID-19 related complications such as child care, caregiver responsibilities, public transportation and other matters that are beyond your control.

These and other challenges have been raised by many of you who have completed our Defence Team COVID-19 Survey, and we will continue to analyze the data and help it inform our actions throughout the Business Resumption Process.

BUSINESS RESUMPTION PLANNING: FROM GUIDANCE TO TACTICAL DECISIONS

You are all different people, with different challenges, working in different roles in different places. As you can see, a one-size-fits-all approach will not be possible. That's why your return to work will be guided by the following directives and plans:

- **Joint CDS/DM Directive for the Resumption of Activities.**

This directive is specific to National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. It is a joint directive from the CDS and I that provides guiding principles on business resumption to our L1s. *If you are a DND employee, this directive will not tell you when you will resume working.* Specific tactical decisions will be made at a more local level. But the directive does set the conditions that all return-to-work plans must follow.

- **Public Health Measures and Personal Protective Equipment**

Directive

This is also specific to National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. It is a joint directive from the CDS and I that outlines the different levels of health measures and personal protective equipment we will use across Defence Team locations. It's how we'll ensure we have consistent safety considerations across the entire Defence Team, as well as what employees can expect to have provided to them.

- **L1 Business Resumption Activities**

These plans are more specific. Guided by the above-two directives, your ADM or military environment commander will issue these overarching plans that take into account factors specific to their areas of responsibility.

No two L1 plans will be the same but most will be interconnected with other L1s'.

Some L1 groups are quite small and a more consistent approach will be possible. Others are huge and spread out and include everything from workshops to airfields to office buildings. L1s are responsible to ensure that their plans consider and adapt to the guiding principles, constraints and restraints that the CDS and I have issued in our Directive.

- **Local Business Resumption Activities**

This is the plan that will tell you when and how you—as a DND civilian employee—will return to work. Before it is implemented, this local plan will have been consulted with local Workplace Health and Safety Committees/Representatives. You should expect to have had one or more discussions with your supervisor on what changes are being made to the workplace, what you can expect, and what will be expected from you to ensure a healthy and safe return to work.

EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE BUSINESS RESUMPTION PROCESS

Our Defence Team goal over the next several months is to set the conditions and then ensure that the operational capability of the CAF and the important supporting and institutional activities resume. We need to protect the health and safety of our Defence Team members. Those two elements must occur in tandem.

As you can see, business resumption can't and won't be a one-size-fits-all approach. (It also may mean working remotely, rather than on site.) However, I do have a number of overarching priorities and expectations. I have shared these with all L1s over the past month and continue to do so. The CDS and I will reinforce this message with our General and Flag Officers and Executives at our virtual town hall next week. And I will share them with you today.

1. **As a DND employee, your business resumption direction ultimately comes from within National Defence and the Canadian Armed**

Forces. Those decisions are guided by Government of Canada actions, with which we are closely tied. However, we are a very large and very complicated organization, and there are numerous factors we must consider. Therefore, please do not automatically assume return dates or processes in other federal departments apply to you unless you have received specific direction from within DND.

2. **Communication between staff and managers is essential.** Managers and supervisors must talk to all their staff before finalizing their back to work plan. Every single Defence Team member should be able to have an honest conversation with their supervisor about whether the COVID-19 circumstances are impacting their ability to resume work. Staff must be able to voice their concerns and ask whatever questions they have.
3. **All local back-to-work plans must be built with input from Health and Safety Wellness Committees and Health and Safety Reps.** This is non-negotiable.
4. **Managers must conduct a Gender Based Analysis Plus assessment of their back to work plans.** Your L1s will have further guidance on this, and it is also non-negotiable. Certain groups of people are disproportionately affected by pandemic conditions, particularly parents or caregivers with young or school-age children, or those caring for ill or elderly relatives.
5. **Managers should test the accuracy of their assumptions with their senior leaders before relaying their plans to employees.** We have encountered situations where managers assumed dates and processes, but those assumptions were incorrect. Managers and supervisors should brief-up on their plans before they are implemented, both with your chain of command and with whomever is the ultimate authority for the site on which your employees work (i.e. Base and Wing commanders).

699 LEAVE

For those on "699 leave" right now, "stand-by and stay safe". The whole Defence Team leadership appreciates the complexity of the tough situation we find ourselves in. Many people are struggling with child care or family obligations and potential medical issues related to COVID-19. Guidance from the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) regarding this special leave provision remains in effect and will be re-evaluated by TBS in late June. We'll update you on any changes at that time.

Broadly speaking, as child-care once again becomes safe and available, our general expectation is that those on "699 leave" will go back to working regular hours. That said, many situations are complicated. Please share your challenges with your manager. If you are a manager and you have questions, check out the HR Go RH app or contact the Labour Relations and Compensation teams in HR-CIV. They are there to help.

You will hear more about all of this in the coming weeks, and you may have many questions. Your main point of contact for those questions should be your manager, or the person to whom you report if you are a manager yourself. We will also have Frequently Asked Questions available, a business resumption question inbox (coming soon), and many other resources available to you.

If you are a manager, HR-CIV, DND and the Government of Canada have many resources to support you during this time. For instance, HR-CIV has produced a toolkit for managers in the HR GO RH app and the Canadian School of Public Service has created a 30-minute online training module on how to establish effective virtual teams. All managers of civilian employees will complete this course.

We are going through a challenging time. But I am greatly encouraged by the huge degree of flexibility we've already seen from members across the Defence Team. I am confident that we can continue to evolve as an organization to overcome the challenges that COVID-19 presents.

Please know that your senior management team is here to support you in this business resumption process, and that—as difficult and uncertain as it feels—you are not alone. As in all things with this Defence Team, we are in this together, and we will get through this together.

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