



COVID-19 Questions and Answers - Resource Industry

1. How are mines protecting their worksites from workers travelling from the south?

Charter flights have been introduced to reduce or eliminate the interactions of mine workers with commercial airline travelers. Protocols for these charter flights include enhanced cleanings, changes to or the elimination of food and beverage services, and physical distancing measures. Workers are also being asked to wear face masks during travel. Where possible, companies require workers to not use public transportation when travelling to pick-up points (commercial flights, cabs, trains, etc.).

All southern workers travelling to the NWT are being screened with temperature testing, questionnaires, and pre-departure screening calls. If an employee or contractor shows signs of illness or has a higher exposure risk, they are told to remain at home. At southern pickup points, departure lounges, and pre-boarding health screening areas are located away from general passenger areas.

2. What steps are being taken to screen workers heading to the mines?

Companies must complete workplace risk assessment before any workers travel to the worksite. Each must be kept on file and provided to the WSCC upon request. High-risk workers are not to be permitted to travel to site. All workers must practice 14 days of [social distancing](#) before returning to the worksite and report any symptoms: this includes all southern transient workers and local employees.

Similarly, all workers are being screened at pickup points and before they leave the mine site. Measures in place include temperature testing, questionnaires, and pre-pickup screening phone calls. If a worker has a higher-risk travel history or shows signs of illness, they are told to remain at home.

This process is currently working. Workers have been barred from travelling to a mine site based on these screening protocols.

3. What is being done to reduce the mixing of northern and southern workforces at NWT mine and petroleum sites - or during transportation to these sites?

All companies have implemented extensive prevention measures for their workers and worksites and are continuously monitoring and updating them. As much as possible, southern workers are being segregated from northern workers.

The diamond mines are chartering their southern workers directly to their worksite.

Imperial Oil has also implemented a charter flight for its southern-based workers.

On site, [social distancing](#) is being strictly enforced. Interaction between all workers is minimal or eliminated. (In Norman Wells, southern workers are only allowed daily travel between the Imperial Oil camp and the worksite.)

In general, companies have reduced their workforces to minimum requirements, increased the length of shifts, and eliminated non-essential travel to worksites



wherever possible. Resident workers from smaller, more remote communities have been placed on paid leave.

4. If southern workers are using public transportation facilities or airlines, why are they not self-isolating upon arrival as is happening in the Yukon?

The Office of the Chief Public Health Officer, the GNWT's Pandemic Planner, and the Workers Safety and Compensation Commission have worked with senior company officials and their medical staff to develop the risk reduction measures currently in use at remote worksites in the NWT. The combination of risk reduction measures that are being applied in the NWT are considered to be the best suited for the NWT's unique environment.

This has not meant that large operators have become complacent – the opposite is true. Companies continue to reach out to officials as they implement additional COVID-19 protocols. The Office of the CPHO and other officials continue to evaluate the risks associated with travelers in general.

5. What steps is industry taking to combat COVID-19 at their job sites?

Northern work sites are incorporating many of the same precautions that NWT residents are being asked to take and more. Office closure and work-from-home policies have been implemented for workers who can do so.

Companies have implemented enhanced hygiene and cleaning practices, and increased communication with workers.

[Social distancing](#) measures have been incorporated for safety meetings, transportation, all work spaces, and in dining halls and accommodations.

All operators have also established dedicated quarantine facilities and practices.

The number of workers at all sites has been reduced. As much as possible, southern workers are being segregated from northern workers. (In Norman Wells, southern workers are only allowed daily travel between the Imperial Oil camp and the worksite.)

All non-essential travel to the mines has been eliminated. Longer shifts have also been adopted to minimize workforce interactions and allow workers on their off shift to conduct 14 days of social distancing prior to returning to site.

Most companies have posted COVID-19 information on their website. Companies can also be contacted directly.

6. What will an employee do if they feel sick or need to isolate while at camp.

All workers will now complete a health screening prior to the start of each shift. ([Public Health Order](#) of April 10, 2020)

Workers will remain in their room and not report for their shift if feeling unwell. An initial medical assessment will be conducted in their room. Quarantine areas have been established by all of the diamond mines should a worker require isolation and monitoring. Medical staff on site will deal with this situation should it occur.

Companies will not hesitate to medevac a worker to Yellowknife should advanced medical care be needed.



This approach is consistent with current health practices and regulations that all mine operators follow.

7. How many camps or remote worksites are there in the NWT?

There are currently two diamond mines operating and a third is in care and maintenance (but will still need a cross section of workers to maintain the site). There is also the Imperial Oil facility in Norman Wells that is still operating. All of these operations have reduced their workforces. Most smaller exploration projects are currently inactive, as is the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road Joint Venture

8. Who is determining, monitoring or enforcing what resource companies are doing to protect their workers?

The Office of the Chief Public Health Officer, the GNWT's Pandemic Planner, and the Workers Safety and Compensation Commission (WSCC) have worked with senior company officials and their medical staff to develop the risk reduction measures currently in use at remote worksites in the NWT. They are enforceable under the terms of a [Public Health Order](#) which carries penalties of up to a \$10,000 fine and six months in jail. The WSCC is also involved in ensuring compliance with orders and regulations. The WSCC Chief Inspector of Mines has and will perform site inspections. A Compliance and Enforcement Taskforce has been put in place to investigate complaints about companies and residents not following the rules of the Public Health Act or public health orders.

9. Why not just shut down the mines temporarily?

Health and safety is obviously the top priority for everyone, however we are also mindful that putting a mine into "care and maintenance" (short term closure) is costly for both the mine and the NWT economy and will not eliminate the need for a cross section of northern and southern workers to travel to the site in order to keep all sites safe and in compliance.

10. Why not just ban all southern workers and run these operations with resident employees?

Unfortunately, not all of the required skill sets exist in our territory. Companies are working to minimize their flow of workers across the NWT border.



11. Why not just run these operations entirely with southern workers that can fly directly to the mine sites?

In addition to addressing health and safety concerns as a first priority, we also want to protect the livelihood of NWT residents working in our resource industry. Mines are looking at all possible scenarios in their operations.

12. Why are workers from communities being treated differently those from Yellowknife and the south?

The GNWT and industry recognize that the NWT's smaller communities could be more severely impacted by the spread of COVID-19. Elders in these communities are of particular concern.

The diamond mines, in particular, have implemented specific precautions for NWT workers from these smaller communities and the communities they reside in.