

COVID-19: Industry responds to protect health and safety of workers and communities

Amidst the most unprecedented health crisis to have ever hit the country, northern mines have taken major steps to do all they can to ensure the safety of their workers and of our northern communities.

With the mines' strong focus on healthy and safety, they have all developed action plans to prevent the pandemic from reaching their sites.

Measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, include implementing screening protocols for all site workers, body temperature checks, increased sanitizing of mine sites, aircraft and buses, preparation of individual meals, and arranging for and communicating the importance of physical distancing and proper hygiene including hand washing.

Other proactive actions include developing and preparing pandemic plans, modifying camps for potential quarantine, chartering aircraft across Canada to bring in employees, and requiring office staff to work from home. Site visits are limited too, with non-essential travel halted.

The mines are protecting the small northern and Indigenous communities too. Remote communities especially vulnerable to the virus due to housing overcrowding, and limited community medical facilities. As a result, the mines have sent over 1,200 northern community workers home. This move, as with other decisions made by the mines, follows guidance from health authorities and governments.

"We want to emphasize that we are working closely with medical experts, local government and health authorities to implement actions to protect the health and safety of employees, community and contractor partners," De Beers reported.

One mine operator, Dominion Diamond Mines, has placed its operation into [care and maintenance](#); reducing staff at the site to the minimum needed to pause work but keep the site ready for a return to operations. "This preventative action was determined to be a necessary step given the rapid spread of the virus, the remote location of the Ekati mine's operations and the high frequency of air travel required for employees and support staff to access mining operations," Dominion said in its release.

The length of work rotations have been increased to help reduce the risk of virus entry to the mines. Rotations have been increased to four weeks on/four weeks off, or three weeks on/three weeks off. In addition, the mines are working with their teams to manage fatigue.



Northern mines have taken numerous steps, including screening protocols for all workers, to stop the spread of COVID-19. De Beers photo

“The safety of our employees and communities remains our top priority during this time of unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19 worldwide and to our industry. At this point we are partially suspending operations to manage risk while putting in place procedures to protect those workers who continue to be engaged. We will continue to evaluate the situation, but also will be actively planning for escalation should that be prudent,” said Jason Neal, President and Chief Executive Officer of TMAC, which operates the Hope Bay mine in the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut.

The most recent action and a very progressive one – to help reduce COVID-19 risks was taken by Agnico Eagle Mines which is helping pilot a project with a top researcher to voluntarily test workers in a lab brought to their Meliadine mine site. Under guidance from a doctor and distinguished researcher, AEM’s lab can produce results within one day. All COVID-19 procedures were drafted respecting Health Canada recommendations says a [media report](#).

“Agnico Eagle has a responsibility to provide a safe workplace and our priority is to protect the health and safety of our employees and the surrounding communities, especially in a context such as Nunavut”, said Sean Boyd, Agnico Eagle’s CEO. “We are extremely grateful to Dr. Kobinger and his team for allowing us to be a pilot project for this new rapid COVID-19 testing lab as it provides us with an advanced level of protection for our employees and the communities.”

On the exploration side, risks are now down to zero. All exploration work has ground to a halt as advanced projects and camps have been shutdown and [demobilized](#).

“We believe that this (closing of the site) is the responsible course of action for Sabina and aligns with our responsibility to our Northern stakeholders,” said Bruce McLeod, President & CEO. “We are simply following advice from federal, provincial and territorial health authorities to do our part to flatten the curve of this virus. In addition, in times like these, people need to be with their families,” said Bruce McLeod, President & CEO of Sabina Gold & Silver.

With actions in place now to protect mines and communities, the big questions now include: How long will this last? Will exploration ever recover without tremendous assistance? Is this a permanent change to our way of life? Time will tell. Stay healthy! Below are member releases, which include details of their respective responses, to COVID-19. Be safe and stay healthy!

- [De Beers measures and Gahcho Kué Mine](#)
- [TMAC announces initiatives in response to COVID-19](#)
- [Baffinland measures at Mary River Mine](#)
- [Agnico Eagle provides further update on Quebec and Nunavut operations](#)
- [Message from Agnico Eagle CEO on the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Gahcho Kué Mine implements additional COVID-19 prevention measures](#)
- [Dominion suspends operations at Ekati mine in response to Coronavirus](#)
- [Nighthawk provides update on 2020 exploration program amid COVID-19](#)
- [Seabridge Gold reports on its COVID-19 response](#)
- [Sabina Gold & Silver update on corporate office and Back River site operations](#)
- [Auryn provides corporate update and addresses COVID-19 impacts](#)
- [Mountain Province postpones 3rd diamond sale of 2020 until further notice](#)

This article is included in the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines [March 2020 newsletter](#).