

Ministry of Health

COVID-19 Guidance: Essential Workplaces

Version 1, May 2, 2020

This guidance provides basic information only. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis, treatment or legal advice.

The purpose of this document is to assist with the minimization of COVID-19 transmission in non-health care workplaces. However, this document may not be applicable to all non-health care workplaces (e.g., congregate living settings). Appropriate preventative measures should be put in place which account for the specific hazards and risks of exposure that may be present in a workplace setting.

Employers may refer to additional sector-specific guidance provided by the [Ministry of Health](#) (MOH), the [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#) (MLTSD) and industry partners to ascertain what types of preventative measures may be appropriate for particular workplace settings.

Please check the MOH [COVID-19 website](#) regularly for updates to this document, the latest case definition, FAQs, and other pertinent information.

General Advice

There are several things that workplaces can do to protect their workers¹ and customers:

- Implement organizational pandemic and/or business continuity plans as appropriate. These should include plans to address situations when workers are unwell or when they are not able to work due to other circumstances.
- Develop communication policies and procedures about what to do if their workers are ill.
- Have workers work from home, whenever possible, and equip them with the means to do so.

¹ Refers to staff (i.e., workers) and is intended to include, students, or volunteers that conduct business or related activities, where applicable and appropriate.

- In situations where workers are deemed essential and need to physically come into the workplace, review infection prevention and control/occupational health and safety policies and procedures with all workers.
- Review COVID-19 guidance from your industry associations to determine the steps workers need to take to be properly prepared in the workplace.
- Instruct workers to self-monitor for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) such as fever, cough or difficulty breathing. If they have symptoms, they should use Ontario's [self-assessment tool](#). They can also contact their health care provider or Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000). Advise all workers to stay home if they are unwell.

Prevention

There are many things that workplaces can do to prevent the spread of COVID-19, particularly by facilitating proper [hand hygiene](#), respiratory etiquette and [physical distancing](#), such as:

- Provide access to handwashing and have available alcohol-based hand sanitizers at multiple, prominent locations in the workplace.
 - Ensure there are enough supplies on hand for proper hand hygiene, including pump soap, warm running water and paper towels or hot air dryers.
 - If possible, consider adding alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations throughout the workplace to supplement hand washing. Portable hand sanitizer bottles should also be provided to workers at their work stations if they interact directly with customers. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with greater than 60% alcohol should be used.
 - Workers should conduct hand hygiene between every interaction with customers.
- Non-touch, lined waste disposal receptacles for use by workers and customers should be provided throughout the workplace.
- Implement physical distancing (maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres or 6 feet from other people), to the greatest extent possible. This could include:
 - Using telephone, video conferencing, or the internet to conduct business, including appointments, as much as possible (including within the same building), instead of in person meetings.

- Permitting flexible hours and staggering start times, breaks, and lunches or staggering days that workers are in the workplace.
- Providing physical barriers, such as plexiglass dividers.
- Marking out a distance of 2 metres or 6 feet between seats and seating areas to ensure physical distancing in common or shared spaces and lines (i.e., reception areas, meeting rooms, waiting rooms, grocery lines, kitchenettes, elevators, offices and other work spaces).
- Admitting fewer customers at a given time.
- Dedicating specific hours to high-risk populations, including those over 65 and with disabilities.
- Encouraging the use of self-scanning technologies at check outs.
- Encouraging customers to pack their own purchases, whenever possible, and discouraging the use of multi-use bags,
- Requiring passengers to sit in the rear seat of a vehicle and open the windows, weather permitting, in taxis and rideshares.
- When physical distancing cannot be maintained, employers may implement the use of face coverings as source control (e.g., non-medical masks or cloth masks).
- Encourage contactless methods of payment (tapping credit or debit cards) instead of cash.
 - If cash payments are made, workers should wash or sanitize their hands every time after handling cash.
 - The credit/debit machine should be disinfected frequently throughout the day.
- In addition to routine cleaning, surfaces that have frequent contact with hands should be cleaned and disinfected twice per day and when visibly dirty. Special attention should be paid to commonly touched surfaces in the workplace such as doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches, toilet handles, counters, hand rails, touch screen surfaces, and shared materials, equipment, workstations, keypads, etc.
- Place clear, visible signage at all entrances and within the workplace reminding workers and customers about the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, what to do if they feel unwell and how to protect themselves (e.g., hand hygiene, etc.).

- If travelling is required for any worker, travel should be delayed if they are symptomatic or confirmed to have COVID-19 or have had close contact with someone with COVID-19.
- If the risk of COVID-19 cannot be sufficiently reduced by other methods, PPE may be required. If PPE is to be used, employers must provide adequate training on the care, use and limitations, including how to put on and take off; and when to perform hand hygiene.

Additional Guidance

Entering Homes or Other Workplaces

- If essential work in homes or other workplaces can be delayed, it should be.
- Where it is not possible to delay work, customers should be contacted prior to the worker's arrival to enquire if anyone on the premises is unwell, so the customer can self-isolate during the visit, where possible.
- A daily log should be kept of all the homes and workplace settings the worker has visited while working.
- Work duties should be performed at least 2 metres or 6 feet away from other people, whenever possible. This may include asking customers to move to a room with a closed door or another area of the residence while work is being completed, where possible.
- To minimize contact with surfaces in the home, have customers open doors and turn on lights before the worker enters to work.
- If the worker touches surfaces in the home, they should perform hand hygiene immediately after finishing the work.
- Workers should clean and disinfect all items/tools that were used in the home or workplace, and then perform hand hygiene.

Delivering Goods

- Equip delivery personnel with alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, and disinfectant wipes to clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g., car door handles, steering wheel) and provide them with instructions on their appropriate use and disposal.
- Delivery personnel should use alcohol-based hand sanitizer between deliveries.

- Wherever possible, deliveries should be contactless, with items being left at the door of the customer.
- For deliveries requiring a signature, consider alternate approaches including:
 - Having the delivery personnel call and inform the customer of the drop-off and that it has been received.
 - Informing customers in advance that signatures will not be obtained and documenting the reason for not obtaining the signature.
- Consider additional guidance on [handling and receiving packages](#) by the Infrastructure Health & Safety Association.

Providing Curbside Pickup

- For large numbers of orders, plan a traffic and pick-up route, and consider staggering pick-up times.
- Customers who drive should remain in their vehicle when orders are being placed in their vehicles by workers.
- Surfaces where orders are placed or organized should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Consider additional guidance on [providing curbside pick-up](#) by Workplace Safety & Prevention Services.

Multiple Jobs or Work Settings

- Whenever possible, workers should only work in one work location.
- The date and time of different work locations of a worker should be documented in case a worker contracts COVID-19 and contact tracing is required.
- Between jobs or work settings, workers should adhere to hand and respiratory hygiene recommendations, as well as physical distancing protocols.
- Workers who report to multiple employers should be familiar with the occupational health and safety policy of each of their employers.

Food Premises and Food Processing, Manufacturing and Distribution

- Reinforce safe handling practices to all workers.
- Protect food from contamination at all times, such as ensuring guards or coverings for food and utensils.

- If a food handler wears gloves to conduct food preparation and handling activities, the worker must wash their hands prior to glove use and after the gloves are removed.
 - The gloves must be replaced, and hands washed, after any suspected contamination such as sneezing, touching the face, or contact with frequently touched surfaces.
- Clean and sanitize utensils and equipment in accordance with the with the [Food Premises Regulation](#) or applicable provincial and federal regulations.
- Note the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs inspectors may discuss current practices with facility operators (under their jurisdiction) and, under critical circumstances, contact the local public health unit for urgent advice and consultative support regarding COVID-19 public health precautions.
 - The public health unit may be able to provide advice on issues such as contact tracing, advice for returning to work following a worker testing positive for COVID-19, and cleaning and disinfection procedures.
 - If highly critical, a joint inspection may be conducted at the facility.

Construction Industries

- Refer to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development's guidance on [Construction site health and safety during COVID-19](#) and the Infrastructure Health & Safety Association's [COVID-19 resources](#).

Mining, or other Resource Industries

- Reduce labour and operations as needed to allow for physical distancing, including maintenance-only operations.
- If travel to and from worksite is provided by the employer, and includes multiple workers, it should be conducted in a manner that permits physical distancing. For example, consideration should be given to the placement of workers in a vehicle during travel and driving with windows open (weather permitting).
- Consider reducing frequent fly-in, fly-out, or other long-distance domestic travel.
- Consider additional [guidance on mining](#) from Workplace Safety North.

For Agriculture Industries

- If workers have shared accommodations, refer to the [Guidance Document for Temporary Foreign Workers](#) for more information.
- Consider additional guidance on the agriculture and food processing and manufacturing from the [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#).

Suspected or Confirmed Case of COVID-19 in the Workplace

- If a worker develops COVID-19 symptoms, they should return home and self-isolate immediately.
 - If they cannot leave immediately, the worker should be isolated in a specific space until they are able to leave.
- If the worker is very ill, call 911 and let the operator know that the person may have COVID-19.
- If the worker does not have severe symptoms, they should use Ontario's [self-assessment tool](#), and seek assessment and testing (e.g., at an assessment centre) if indicated to do so. They can also contact their health care provider or Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000).
- Any worker who tests positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by the local [public health unit](#). The public health unit will perform case management and contact tracing that may require additional infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures to be put in place in the workplace, which could include additional testing, people self-isolating etc.
- Workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 must self-isolate at home for 14 days.
- Surfaces that were touched by the ill worker should be disinfected as soon as possible in accordance with enhanced environmental cleaning procedures and protocols. See Public Health Ontario's [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings COVID-19 fact sheet](#).

Occupational Health & Safety

- Employers have legal duties under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) (OHSA) to protect the health and safety of their workers², including from the transmission of infectious disease in the workplace. Following the guidance in this document may help an employer comply with those obligations.
- If COVID-19 is suspected or diagnosed in a worker, return to work should be determined in consultation with their health care provider and the local public health unit, based on provincial guidance. Detailed occupational health and safety guidelines for COVID-19 are available on the MOH [COVID-19 website](#) and the MLTSD [website](#).
- If the worker's illness is from an exposure at the workplace, in accordance with the [OHSA](#) and its regulations, an employer must provide a written notice within four days of being advised that a worker has an occupational illness, including an occupationally-acquired infection, or if a claim has been made to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) by or on behalf of the worker with respect to an occupational illness, including an occupational infection, to the:
 - Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development;
 - Joint health and safety committee (or health and safety representative); and
 - Trade union, if any.
- The information required in a notice is outlined in sector specific regulations made under the OHSA.
- For more information please contact:
 - The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development:
 - Employment Standards Information Centre: Toll-free: 1-800-531-5551
 - Health and Safety Contact Centre: Toll-free: 1-877-202-0008
 - The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board: 1-800-387-0750

² This section will refer to workers as defined under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

Optimizing the Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- In most situations, workers do not need to wear PPE to protect against COVID-19. The current COVID-19 pandemic does not change existing PPE requirements that may apply to certain workplaces or professions.
- If work involves direct contact with individuals who have respiratory symptoms (e.g., coughing and sneezing), a confirmed COVID-19 infection or direct contact with contaminated objects or environments, appropriate PPE must be used.
 - This may include gloves, a gown, a surgical/procedure mask, and/or a face shield. Note that for protection against COVID-19, N95 respirators are only required for aerosol generating medical procedures (AGMPs) and when otherwise determined by a regulated health professional.
- If PPE is provided by the employer, workers must be trained on the safe use, care and limitations of PPE, including [putting on and taking off PPE](#) as well as proper disposal.
 - Workers should ensure that gloves have no pinholes or tears and fit securely around their hands.
 - Gloves should be removed first, and hand hygiene should be performed immediately after removing gloves. The mask should then be removed, and hand hygiene performed again.

Resources

Sector-Specific Guidance:

- For additional sector-specific guidance, please see the:
 - [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#), and
 - Websites of provincial Health and Safety Associations (HSAs):
 - [Infrastructure Health and Safety Association](#) (IHSA)
 - [Public Services Health and Safety Association](#) (PSHSA)
 - [Workplace Safety North](#) (WSN)
 - [Workplace Safety and Prevention Services](#) (WSPS)

Additional Information for Workplaces:

- Government of Canada's: [Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and [Advice for Essential Retailers During COVID-19 pandemic](#).
- Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development: [Workplace exposure and illness](#)
- Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development: [Infection prevention and control](#)