Infrastructure Health and Safety Association Guidance on worker responsibilities during COVID-19

Overview

During the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, we all need to do our part to keep workers, customers and the public safe and healthy so we can stop the spread and prepare to reopen the province, when we are ready.

Below is a set of resources, tips and best practices to help employers and employees prevent the spread of COVID-19 and work together to reopen the province.

Employers and workers in Ontario have certain duties and rights under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations. Employers should also review and follow any applicable directives and guidance coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Ministry of Health.

Learn more about:

- workers' rights
- employers' responsibilities

Best practices

Recognize hazards and assess risks: The first step to controlling risks in a workplace is to identify the risks. This applies to all workplace hazards, not just COVID-19. Identifying and controlling workplace hazards is required of all employers in Ontario under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations.

Some important COVID-19 risk information includes how it is spread and what can increase the risk of a worker becoming infected. COVID-19 can be spread at the workplace in two main ways:
1. person to person – by people who are in close contact
2. by surfaces or objects – when people touch their face with contaminated hands

The level of risk in an activity will be related to the number of opportunities for transmission of the virus. This includes how close people come to each other, how many different interactions there are between people, how often people touch surfaces or objects and how long people stay in a space.

For more information, visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

It is possible for COVID-19 to be spread by people who do not have any symptoms. This makes effective control measures very important. We must act as if everyone is infected when setting up controls.

The risk of severe health outcomes is not the same for all workers. The risk increases with age and is higher for people with certain medical conditions.

What are the symptoms? Symptoms range from mild, like the flu and other common respiratory infections, to severe. The most common symptoms include:

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing
- fatigue

Complications from the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) can include serious conditions, like pneumonia or kidney failure, and in some cases, death.

Controls:

Infection prevention and control measures prevent the spread of the virus by breaking the chain of transmission. For example, public health guidance includes staying at least 2 metres away from others which avoids close contact; washing hands removes the virus and prevents people from touching their faces with contaminated hands.

For COVID-19 in the workplace, it is recommended that employers and business owners conduct a risk assessment to determine the most appropriate controls and actions for a particular workplace/situation. Reference the IHSA's guide on the risk assessment process to help facilitate this and review Sample 1, Sample 2 for examples.

Always start by considering the most effective controls first. It is best to begin by trying to eliminate the hazard – to remove it from the workplace altogether. Where that is not possible, use multiple engineering and administrative controls first to prevent the spread. Protective equipment (including personal protective equipment (PPE) and community protective equipment) should be relied on only where engineering and administrative controls do not sufficiently reduce the risk to workers.

In addition to the above recommendations, employers should determine whether personal protective equipment (PPE)* needs to be part of their hazard control plan. The need for PPE should be based on a risk assessment taking into account environmental conditions and also take into consideration input from the local public health unit. Although proper use of PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other control measures.

- Workers must use personal protective equipment as required by their employer.
- Workers should be trained on the proper use, care and limitations of any required PPE.

For more information, visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

*NOTE: Please be reminded that most face coverings (non-medical masks) have not been tested to a known standard and do not constitute PPE. In some circumstances, face coverings may be used as an effective means of source control, but should not be viewed as an appropriate substitute for physical distancing in the workplace.

1. **Maintain physical distancing.** Everyone in Ontario should be practicing physical distancing to reduce their exposure to other people. They should do their best to avoid close contact with people outside of their immediate families. Close contact includes being within two (2) meters (6 feet) of another person.

2. **If you become ill.** There is no specific treatment for COVID-19, and there is no vaccine that protects against this coronavirus. Most people with common human coronavirus illnesses will recover on their own. To aid in recovery, you should do the following:

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Get rest and sleep as much as possible.
- Try a humidifier or a hot shower to help with a sore throat or cough.

If you start to feel symptoms of COVID-19: Anyone who begins to feel unwell (fever, new cough, or difficulty breathing) should return home and self-isolate immediately.

People who are self-isolating should seek clinical assessment over the phone; either by calling their primary care provider's office or Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000). If you need additional assessment, your primary care provider or Telehealth Ontario will direct you. If you need immediate medical attention you should call 911 and mention your travel history and symptoms.

Steps to take:
- Immediately isolate yourself from other workers.
- Immediately advise your supervisor of your concerns.
- Report to your supervisor a list of where you have been and who you have been in contact with on the project.
- Wash or disinfect your hands, avoid touching surfaces and put on a surgical or procedural mask. If none is available, consider an N95 type respirator. If there is no approved PPE masking readily available, at least cover your mouth and nose with another type of face covering until one can be obtained. Consider having extra approved masking in the first aid kit for such emergencies.
- Maintain physical distancing. Physical distancing means maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) between persons. By maintaining physical distancing, you are less likely to expose others or be exposed to a respiratory virus.

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- Provide your contact information and obtain the phone number for the supervisor and your employer so that you can inform them of your COVID-19 test results. If the results are negative, this information may allow any other workers who are in self-isolation to learn they are not at risk from their exposure to you, and may allow them to return to work.
- Be aware of the risk of transmission while travelling home and keep your face protection in place. This will help minimize the spread of the virus in your vehicle and protect others if you are using shared or public transportation.

3. **How to self-isolate.** Self-isolating means staying at home and avoiding contact with other people to help prevent the spread of disease to others in your home and your community.

Evaluate:

Changes to work procedures or practices related to COVID-19 may affect the way you have routinely managed other risks in the workplace. Thus, it is recommended that you consider the various preventative measures on an ongoing basis, and review and adjust accordingly if they are not working as intended or have created new risks or challenges.

Monitor your personal health, take self-assessments if you suspect changes to your health, and keep up to date on Public Heath communications. Listen to your employer's communications regarding protections to take to avoid the virus and to protect from you inadvertently spreading the virus.

Ontario's Stop the spread webpage provides information to assess symptoms at home (or at work), how to isolate, and, many other topics.

Resources

Stay updated with daily government updates:

- **Government of Ontario**
- **Government of Canada**
- **Public Health Ontario**

Ontario government and agency-issued resources about COVID-19

Develop your COVID-19 workplace safety plan: Learn how you can create a plan to help protect your workers and others from novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). **Workplace Safety Plan**

The **Ontario Ministry of Health** is providing consistent updates on the provincial government's response to the outbreak, including:

- status of cases in Ontario
- current affected areas

For more information, visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

- symptoms and treatments
- how to protect yourself and self-isolate
- updated Ontario news on the virus

Public Health Ontario is providing up-to-date resources on COVID-19, including:

- links to evolving public health guidelines, position statements and situational updates
- synopsis of key articles updating on the latest findings related to the virus
- recommendations for use of personal protective equipment
- information on infection prevention and control
- testing information
- other public resources

Other COVID-19 resources

Health Canada outlines the actions being taken by the Government of Canada to limit spread of the virus, as well as what is happening in provinces and communities across the country. It also maintains a live update of the number of cases by province.

The **World Health Organization** is updating the latest guidance and information related to the global outbreak and spread beyond Canadian borders.

It also provides the most up-to-date information on:

- current research and development around the virus
- a COVID-19 situation "dashboard"
- emergency preparedness measures
- live media updates on the spread of the virus

This resource does not replace the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations, and should not be used as or considered legal advice. Health and safety inspectors apply the law based on the facts in the workplace.

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