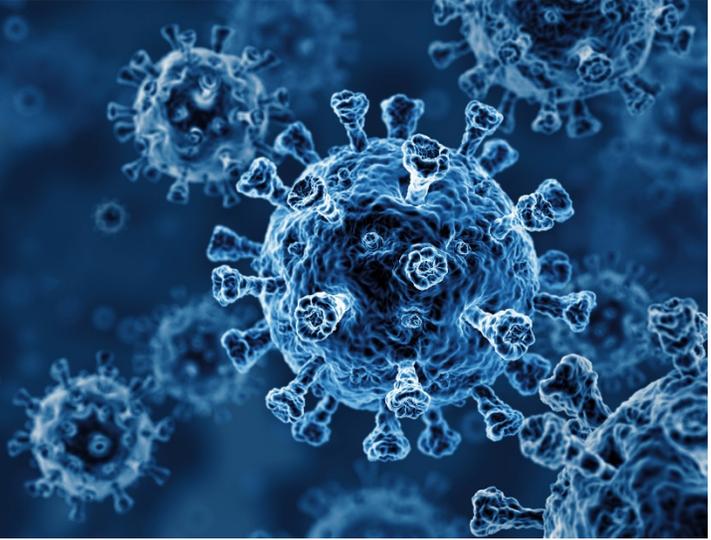




MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE JOINT HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE (JHSC) DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS (COVID-19)

This PSHSA Fast Fact is intended to provide workplace parties with the information on maintaining an effective JHSC during emergency situations.

The continued operation of an effectively functioning JHSC is a legal requirement for Ontario workplaces. Effective JHSC is particularly critical during emergencies such as the COVID -19 pandemic. Committee members must be well informed of the hazards, remain active in identifying hazards and recommend controls for hazards in a timely manner.



RESPONSIBILITIES OF A JHSC

Under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act \(OHSA\)](#), some of the main responsibilities of a JHSC include:

- Hold JHSC meetings at least quarterly and create a written schedule for these meetings.
- Consider having more frequent meetings (virtually) during a pandemic as the situation continues to evolve rapidly.
- Conduct regular [workplace inspections](#) and prioritize risks to ensure high risk hazards are immediately communicated to area supervisor and are addressed.
- Make recommendations to the employer on control measures for the identified hazards.
- Follow up on recommended controls to ensure they have been put in place in the workplace and are effective.

HOW CAN THE JHSC AND EMPLOYER BE EFFECTIVE DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS (SUCH AS THE CURRENT COVID-19 PANDEMIC)?

- Environmental Cleaning and Disinfecting protocols must be followed in the workplace – [Public Health Ontario best practice](#)
- Establish and continuously enforce [screening practices](#)
- Review and ensure implementation of the directives from the [Ontario Ministry of Health](#) and the [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#)



- Ensure workers and visitors are aware of preventive practices as outlined by the [Public Health Ontario](#). Provide instructional posters in the workplace and visually confirm that workers are complying with best practice guidance.
- Ensure any and all hazards pertaining specifically to COVID-19 are identified and communicated to the employer by the JHSC. Also ensure that Employers address these recommendations in a timely manner.
- Maintain JHSC meetings via alternative means (e.g., teleconference, videoconference) as a temporary solution to physical distancing directives.
- Ensure regular and current communication on the pandemic situation is shared with all JHSC members and workplace parties.

JHSC MEETINGS:

- JHSCs must continue to meet at least quarterly as per the legislation and document any challenges with meeting this mandatory requirement.
- Attempt to put in place virtual meetings or conference call meetings to ensure the meeting schedule is kept.
- If committee members are in the workplace and conference / online / video conferencing platforms are not available – ensure meetings are held strictly adhering to the physical distancing best practices. This should be the last resort.
- When using video or conference call to hold meetings, ensure all relevant documents are provided in advance of the meeting (e.g., agenda, minutes, incident reports, hazard reports, etc.) to allow all members on the call to participate.
- In agreement with trade unions, special considerations should be made to keep JHSC worker members available / employed (either in the workplace or from home) to perform their meeting and inspection duties. This could also apply to management JHSC members.

WORKPLACE INSPECTIONS:

- The legislation requires monthly inspections, as a minimum standard.
- If the organization operations and associated facilities have been closed an inspection is likely not required when workers are not onsite. It is important to document changes to an inspection schedule and it is recommended to plan an inspection before resuming occupancy.
- During a pandemic, inspection checklists can be supplemented with additional relevant items, focusing on cleaning, physical distancing, personal protective equipment, hygiene facilities, etc.
- In emergency situations, if the facility is closed and no JHSC inspection was conducted, this should be documented and records kept for future reference, as part of due diligence.
- As a temporary solution, JHSC can designate an onsite staff member to conduct physical inspections, in case a JHSC worker member is not available to carry out the inspections.
- Where organizations normally have both worker and management JHSC members conducting the inspections together, reduce this to just the legislatively required worker member in order to keep physical distancing and employee safety in mind.
- Document the inspections electronically if possible to eliminate the handling of paper checklists.



- Wear appropriate and available personal protective equipment (PPE) while inspecting. [Contact your PSHSA consultant](#) to help identify appropriate PPE.
- Conduct JHSC site inspections during off hours when workers are not present.
- Adhere to physical distancing directives during all physical inspections.
- Document and prioritize all hazards identified during an inspection.
- Make sure all identified hazards are addressed within a reasonable timeframe based on their level of risk.
- JHSC worker member can utilize virtual technology (e.g., video and telephone) to connect with onsite worker and supervisor to assist with conducting the workplace inspection.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Support from Senior Leadership and Supervisors is essential to ensure the JHSC continues to function effectively and safe work practices are enforced.
- Employers have the responsibility to provide JHSC members with sufficient knowledge and education to carry out their duties on the committee. This includes providing access to latest and accurate information on the novel COVID-19 virus as it relates to workplace health and safety.
- JHSC plays a key role in supporting the Internal Responsibility System (IRS) of the organization. JHSC assists in identifying gaps in the organizational Health and Safety Program and reporting these to the employer for action.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Additional resources and information on COVID-19 can be found at the links below:

- [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#)
- [Public Services Health and Safety Association](#)
- [Ontario.ca COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#)
- [Ontario emergency information for Employers and Workplaces](#)