



HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19 FOR LONG TERM CARE



OVERVIEW

This is not a legal document and employers are advised to seek legal advice.

Employers have obligations to protect workers from hazards in the workplace as set out in the [Occupational Health and Safety Act \(OHSA\)](#) and its regulations and the directives coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Workers should raise any concerns to their:

- Supervisor
- Joint Health and Safety Committee or Health and Safety Representative, if any

Ontario is currently in the midst of a [global pandemic](#). While the COVID-19 situation is changing daily, **the legislation and regulations related to occupational health and safety in Ontario's workplaces remain in force.**

Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from hazards in the workplace. Workers have the [right to refuse unsafe work](#). If health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can seek enforcement by filing a complaint with the ministry's Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008.

BEST PRACTICES TO KEEP YOUR WORKERS HEALTHY AND SAFE

The health and safety of workers is a top concern amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. Health and safety in long-term care homes has always been critical to the proper functioning of these facilities. During this



time of crisis, long-term care facilities need to be extra vigilant in ensuring that infection control practices are adhered to for the continued safety of workers and patients alike.

All measures and controls taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should be done in compliance with requirements under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and associated regulations and public health directives issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

In addition, below are a set of resources, tips and best practices to help employers prevent the spread of COVID-19.

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND CO-WORKERS

Coronaviruses are spread from person-to-person through close contact, including at work. Here are some [helpful tips](#) to help prevent the spread of germs:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Sneeze and cough into your sleeve.
- If you use a tissue, discard immediately and wash your hands afterward.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid high-touch areas, where possible, or ensure you clean your hands after.
- Do not touch your face with gloved hands. Be sure to remove gloves properly to avoid contamination. Ensure you wash your hands after removing them.
- Wash your clothes as soon as you get home.
- If you are ill: notify your supervisor immediately, complete the self-assessment and follow the instructions you get.

REPORTING ILLNESS

The symptoms of COVID-19 are shared with many other illnesses including the cold and flu. At this time, it is recommended that any worker who is experiencing any symptoms related to cold, flu or COVID-19 be sent home by the employer. For more details refer to the [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance Update](#).

In addition, employers should advise these workers to immediately [self-isolate](#) and complete the online self-assessment or call either:

- Telehealth: 1-866-797-0000
- their primary care provider (for example, family physician)

Asymptomatic workers who have travelled outside of Canada within the last 14 days and/or have had unprotected exposure to a person with COVID-19 and have been identified as [critical to continued operations](#), need to self-isolate when they are not at work. This work isolation requirement also applies to staff who have tested positive but symptoms have resolved. For more details refer to the [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance Update](#).



Healthcare workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 should remain off work until they receive 2 consecutive negative specimens at least 24 hours apart.

- Non test-based approach: HCWs may return to work 14 days after symptom onset (or as directed by their employer/Occupational Health and Safety). For more details refer to [Testing Clearing Cases Guidance](#)

The employer should consult with the local public health unit to determine when the care provider can return to work. Health care workers should also report to their Employee Health/Occupational Health and Safety department prior to return to work.

All health system organizations and employers immediately should cease all non-essential business travel outside of Canada until further notice and likewise discourage employees

Please note that additional resources, policies and procedures are being developed to provide additional support in this area.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND WORKPLACE SAFETY & INSURANCE BOARD REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

If an employer is advised that a worker has tested positive for COVID-19 due to exposure at the workplace, or that a claim has been filed with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), the employer is required to notify:

- the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) in writing within four days
- the workplace joint health and safety committee or a health and safety representative
- a trade union (if applicable)

Employers do not need to notify the ministry if a worker has contracted COVID-19 outside of the workplace.

For more information:

- [Occupational Illness: Requirements to Report to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#)
- [Occupational Illness: Infectious Disease Reporting Form](#)
- [Section 21 Guidance Note](#): Occupational Injury and Illness Reporting Requirement
- MOH [Guidance for Occupational Health and Safety](#): Section on Occupational Illness and Work Restrictions

Workplaces, such as Long-Term Care Homes, to which the [Health Care and Residential Facilities Regulation \(O. Reg 67/93\)](#) applies, must ensure that this report contains all information outlined in Section 5 (5) of the regulation. Employers must also report occupationally-acquired infections to the [WSIB](#) within 72 hours of receiving notification of the illness.



ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AND INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL PLAN

The Government of Ontario also passed emergency orders that will come into effect on April 22, 2020 restricting long-term care staff from working in more than one long-term care home, retirement home or health care setting

Employers should establish an infectious disease preparedness and response plan. The plan should follow recommendations in guidance [notes](#) and [directives](#) from the [Ministry of Health](#) and resources developed by [Public Health Ontario](#). The plan should consider and address levels of risk associated with the workplace and job tasks within long term care homes [and what to do during an outbreak](#). This also includes how the facility will operate during a pandemic for situations such as sanitization of the workplace, equipment and resources, how employees report illness, how to ensure social distancing and how work will be scheduled.

To access the most recent Ministry of Health guidance notes please visit and scroll down to find your relevant sector information:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx

A list of activities and links to relevant resources to provide Long Term Care homes support in this area are listed below:

- Establishing a system for [active screening](#) for workers, residents and essential visitors. Primary screening should ideally be behind a plexiglass barrier, or if not available, while a 2 meter distance is maintained, or if not possible, while using [Droplet/Contact precautions](#).
- Ensuring facilities are equipped with appropriate isolation rooms and increasing capacity of long-term care beds.
- Providing dedicated medical equipment/devices in a room where a resident with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 is being cared for. All non-dedicated and non-disposable equipment should be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with manufacturer instructions and recognized [IPAC best practices](#).
- Implementing administrative controls such as proper training for staff regarding screening and written infection prevention and control protocols, as well as changing work schedules.
- Ensuring availability and proper use of [PPE](#) for Contact/Droplet precautions (gown, gloves, mask/respirator, and eye protection).
- Implement that all staff wear surgical/procedure masks at all times for the protection of residents for the duration of full shifts or visits at long term care homes at all times. This is required regardless of whether the home is in outbreak or not.
- Having a system for reporting probable and confirmed cases to the local [Public Health](#) unit. Communication about who will take responsibility, ensuring proper documentation, and



implementing any advice given by the Public Health unit is critical for containing the spread of COVID-19.

- If an outbreak is declared at the Long-Term Care home, facility-wide outbreak management controls must be implemented in accordance to [Ministry of Health guidance](#) and [directives](#), and resources from Public Health Ontario. This includes but not limited to restricting new admissions, readmissions and discontinuing non-essential activities.
- Being familiar with local testing locations and their specific protocols. Patients should not be showing up to the hospital or assessment centre unannounced.
- Conduct RACE (recognition, assessment, control and evaluation) analysis to determine what other controls may be applicable

ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

Coronaviruses are spread person-to-person through close contact, including at work. While employers always have an obligation to maintain clean workplaces that obligation is under sharper focus during an outbreak like the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Employers should focus on:

- Easy access to soap and water (ways to properly clean hands) or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Frequent sanitation of washroom facilities
- Cleaning and disinfecting of commonly touched surfaces or areas (e.g. door handles, work surfaces equipment)
- Posting signage on hygiene in English and the majority workplace language so everyone can understand how to do their part
- For more information refer to [PIDAC Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in All Health Care Settings](#).

SHARE INFORMATION

It is important that all parties in a workplace understand their roles and responsibilities. Employers will need to ensure health and safety policies are updated and posted for all employees to see. Using industry resources, including this one and those produced by [Public Services Health and Safety Association](#) (PSHSA) will improve workplace understanding.

POST YOUR POLICIES

All employers need to post and communicate COVID-19 policies to employees. These policies should cover how the site will operate, including but not limited to:

- Cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and equipment
- How employees and contractors report illnesses
- How to ensure physical distancing
- How work will be scheduled



PHYSICAL DISTANCING

As advised by the Chief Medical Officer, public health officials, and outlined throughout government communications, physical distancing is required to control the spread of COVID-19.

In order to ensure physical distancing in the workplace, employers should consider:

- The total number of people in areas of the workplace and where they are assigned to work
- Consider implementing a system for virtual and/or telephone consultations whenever possible
- Non-essential face-to-face appointments should be postponed or converted to virtual appointments
- Have staff work from home whenever possible (i.e. administrative staff)
- Staggered start times, breaks and lunches
- The home should be closed to visitors and limiting entry to only essential personnel
- Suspending all group activities and gatherings

TRACK AND MONITOR YOUR WORKFORCE

It is important to track where employees have worked. If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will ask employers to provide information on where the employee worked as well as the contact information of any other employee who may have been exposed. Employers will track information and Public Health Units will respond.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (MLTSD) REQUIREMENTS

HEALTH CARE AND RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES REGULATION

Ontario Regulation 67/93 Health Care and Residential Facilities, which applies to long-term care facilities, states that employers shall develop, in consultation with the joint health and safety committee (JHSC) or health and safety representative (HSR), written measures and procedures for the health and safety of workers, in addition to training and educational programs on health and safety measures and procedures that are relevant to the workers' work. This could include measures needed to protect workers from the risk of COVID-19, such as:

- Safe work practices
- Safe working conditions
- Proper hygiene practices and the use of hygiene facilities
- Control of infections
- Immunization and inoculation against infectious diseases
- Use of appropriate antiseptics, disinfectants and decontaminants
- Use, wearing and care of personal protective equipment and its limitations (such as gloves, gowns, facial protection and respirators).



This regulation also requires that employers must also review the measures and procedures at least once a year or more frequently as prescribed. Additional duties and obligations under this regulation is available at: [Ontario Regulation 67/93 Health Care and Residential Facilities](#).

LONG TERM CARE SECTOR RESOURCES

COVID-19 GOVERNMENT UPDATES

Stay updated with daily government updates:

- [Government of Ontario](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)

ONTARIO GOVERNMENT AND AGENCY ISSUED RESOURCES ABOUT COVID-19

[ONTARIO MINISTRY OF HEALTH](#)

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/>

This above link provides updates on the provincial government response to the pandemic. This includes:

- status of cases in Ontario;
- current affected areas;
- symptoms and treatments;
- how to protect yourself and self-isolate; and
- updated Ontario news on the virus.

[PUBLIC HEALTH ONTARIO](#)

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus>

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

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



OTHER COVID-19 RESOURCES

PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

This link 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.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

WHO provides 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
- the COVID-19 situation globally, through a “dashboard”
- emergency preparedness measures; and,
- live media updates on the spread of the virus.

OTHER RESOURCES

There are a host of additional resources available to help address the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak that are aimed at the Long-Term Care workplaces. Resources include:

- Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development’s dedicated COVID-19 website: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s *Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers* online resource: <https://bit.ly/2UfRgl9>
- Public Health Unit websites: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx>
- World Health Organization’s Infection Prevention and Control guidance for Long-Term Care Facilities in the context of COVID-19: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331508/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPC_long_term_care-2020.1-eng.pdf

PUBLIC SERVICES HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSOCIATION RESOURCES

- Occupational Illness: Infectious Disease Reporting Form: <https://www.pshsa.ca/resources/occupational-illness-infectious-disease-reporting-form>
- COVID-19 Resources: <https://www.pshsa.ca/covid-19>