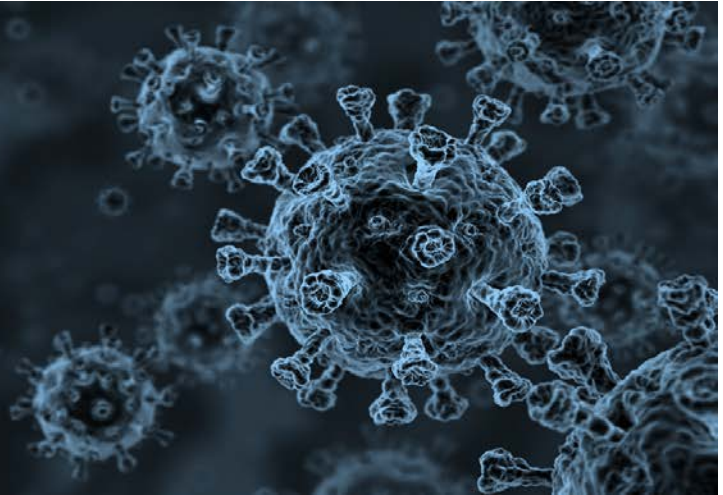




# COVID-19: PRECAUTIONS WHEN WORKING AS A PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKER, HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE PROVIDER



## OVERVIEW

A new type of coronavirus, abbreviated [COVID-19](#), is causing an outbreak of respiratory (lung) disease. The severity of this illness can vary from person to person. There are, however, steps you can take to prevent the spread of infection. This document provides important information to help protect workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

When faced with workplace hazards, organizations should apply a systematic approach to control them. This approach is often called RACE- Recognize, Assesses, Control and Evaluate. RACE is a framework that can be applied to all workplace hazards and is proven to be a highly effective hazard management tool.

## PROTECTING YOURSELF AND CO-WORKERS

The virus typically spreads through coughing and sneezing, personal contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then face – mouth, nose or eyes. Here is some general guidance and [helpful tips](#) to help prevent the spread of germs:

- Maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) or more between persons, including clients and co-workers.
- Promote good hygiene such as:
  - [Wash your hands](#) often with soap and water when hands are visibly soiled, before and after any breaks, at the beginning and end of their shift, and before preparing food or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with 70% alcohol content) if hand washing is not possible.
  - 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 high-touch areas, where possible, or ensure you clean your hands after.
- Practice regular cleaning and disinfection
- Minimize contact with people who are sick



- Stay home if you are sick.
- Where possible, wear [gloves](#) when interacting with high-touch areas. Do not touch your face with gloved hands. Take care when removing gloves. Ensure you wash your hands after removing them.
- Wash your clothes as soon as you get home.
- If you have symptoms or you think you were exposed to COVID-19, notify your supervisor immediately, complete the [self-assessment](#) and follow the instructions you get.

## RECOGNIZE AND ASSESS

According to Health Canada, symptoms can appear in as little as a few days or as long as 14 days after being exposed to someone with the disease. [COVID-19](#) can cause a range of symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat and shortness of breath.

For some people, the symptoms are like having a cold; for others they are quite severe or even life threatening. It is important to check with your healthcare provider, Telehealth, or local Public Health Unit and follow instructions about [staying home](#) or away from public spaces to prevent the spread of the virus.

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Caring for persons symptomatic for COVID-19, persons who have COVID-19 and do not need to stay in a hospital (i.e. self-isolating at home) or a home care client/resident who has recently travelled from outside Canada are likely to pose the greatest exposure risks to personal support workers. Also, close contact with other people increases the risk of exposure to someone who may be infected.

## CONTROL

1. Follow the requirements set out in the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) (OHSA) as well as policies and procedures, including infectious disease preparedness and response plans established by your employer

All workplace parties have roles and responsibilities to protect workers from hazards in the workplace as set out in the OHSA and its regulations, and the applicable 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

Under [Subsection 28\(1\)](#) of the OHSA, workers have a duty to:

- Work in compliance with the provisions of the Act and regulations
- Use or wear the equipment, protective devices or clothing that the worker's employer requires to be used to worn
- Report to his or her employer or supervisor the absence of or defect in any equipment or protective device of which the worker is aware and



- Report to his or her employer or supervisor any contravention of the Act or Regulations or the existence of any hazard of which he or she knows.

Under the OHSA, employers have the duty to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect workers from hazards in the workplace. Workers have [right to refuse unsafe work](#). If health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can file a complaint with the Ministry's Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008 or online see filing a workplace health and safety complaint. Failure of the employer to comply with the OHSA and its regulations could result in enforcement action such as an order to comply, which may include a [stop-work order](#), upon inspection by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

In addition, infectious disease preparedness and response plans established by the employer should be followed. The plan considers and addresses levels of risk associated with the workplace and job tasks. This includes how the workplace will [operate](#) during the COVID-19 outbreak including but not limited to health and safety considerations such as sanitization of workplaces, how workers and employers [report illnesses](#), how to ensure physical distancing, and how work will be scheduled.

2. Maintain [physical distancing](#). Physical distancing generally means maintaining a distance of at least 2 meters (6 feet) or more between persons at all times. By maintaining physical distancing, people are less likely to be exposed to a respiratory virus as the virus can be spread before symptoms appear (pre-symptomatic) and when the person may have contracted the virus but are minimal or no symptoms (asymptomatic).
  - Care providers should be delaying care if possible and only provide essential medical services
  - The client should be instructed to wear a procedure mask (if tolerated) while the care worker is providing care
  - Physical distancing may not be possible when providing care, however, it can be practiced with the people who reside in the home with the client
  - If unable to maintain physical distancing workers can use a [non-medical mask](#) to protect those around them
  - Limiting the total number of people at the workplace and where they are assigned to work
  - Consider implementing a system for virtual and/or telephone consultations when and where possible
  - Non-essential face-to-face appointments should be postponed or converted to virtual appointments
  - Staff may be asked to work from home whenever possible (i.e. administrative staff)
  - Staggered start times, breaks and lunches
  - Restricting visitors and limiting workplace entry to only essential personnel
  - Suspending all group activities and gatherings
  - Altering the workplace layout of the floor by moving furniture or using visual cues such as tape on the floor to enhance physical distancing
  - Lunchrooms and break rooms must be arranged to follow physical distancing practices. Consider staggered lunch and break times to reduce the number of staff gathering.



3. Follow specific guidance for health and safety and infection prevention and control practices and measures and procedures established by the employer.
  - Refer to the [Ministry of Health](#), [Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Government of Canada](#) for COVID-19 Guidance
  - Ensure active screening is conducted. All clients should be screened by telephone before appointments are scheduled and staff should ask about any other person (i.e. visitor or family member) who will be in the home during the appointment and where appropriate, screen this person too.
  - Use appropriate controls when visiting the home. Please refer to the Ontario Ministry of Health Home and community Care Guidance for direction on use of routine practices with additional precautions (contact and droplet) when providing care for patients suspected or confirmed to have Covid-19). This includes hand hygiene and wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) that employer requires the worker to wear (gloves, gown, surgical/procedure mask and eye protection) An N95 respirator is required for all aerosol generating procedures medical procedures.
  - Report probable and confirmed cases to your supervisor or by contacting your [local Public Health unit](#), and follow any advice given.
  - Be familiar with local testing locations and their specific protocols.
  - In addition to routine cleaning, [clean frequently](#) touched surfaces (i.e. steering wheels, door handles, handrails, customer service counters, touch screens, elevator buttons, etc.) at a minimum of twice per day. If the surfaces are visibly dirty, they should be cleaned prior to disinfection application.
  - Personal Support Workers, Home or Community Care Providers should use or wear personal protective equipment (PPE) (i.e. the equipment, protective devices or clothing) that the worker's employer requires to be used or worn. Workers are to be trained on the use and limitations of any PPE that the employer requires to be used by the worker.
  - Proper [donning and doffing of PPE](#) and [hand hygiene](#) should be performed.
4. Stay home if you are feeling ill. Actively [monitor yourself](#) for any symptoms and if you detect symptoms, you should immediately distance yourself from others and go home. If possible, avoiding using public transit to get home. Notify your supervisor so that they are aware of the situation and can also notify others who may have been exposed.
5. Demonstrate the following precautionary measures while working:
  - Do not report to work if you are exhibiting any of the [symptoms](#) or are under [self-isolation](#) or quarantine
  - Limit the amount of face-to-face contact during work activities and [practice physical distancing](#) whenever possible.
  - Use technology for communication (text messaging and mobile phones rather than in-person conversations)
  - Avoid sharing equipment/supplies (ie; phones, tablets) where possible. Disinfect regularly if sharing cannot be avoided



- Limit any casual interactions that normally occur at work
- Change out of work clothing at the end of each shift and wash them. Do not store your street clothes and work clothing in the same space unless both are clean
- Consider discussing any underlying medical conditions that might place you at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 with your Human Resources Department

Additionally, the COVID-19 outbreak is a unique and unprecedented scenario for many workers. Ensure you are taking care of both your mental health and psychological well-being, as well as your physical health, during this time. Find out [helpful tips and coping strategies](#).

6. Practice stringent hand hygiene practices. Health Canada recommends following basic hygiene practices:
- Wash hands frequently
  - Thoroughly [wash hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
  - If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based [hand sanitizer](#) containing 70% alcohol
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
  - Practice respiratory etiquette and sneeze or cough into your sleeve or a tissue and discard it
  - Use a clean tissue or your knuckle/elbow to touch light switches, doors, buttons, etc.

## EVALUATE

Ask and evaluate:

- Were the proper hygiene facilities (soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer) available to you?
- Were you able to practice physical distancing?
- Are you disinfecting (i.e. disposable wipes) frequently touched surfaces routinely?
- Did you use or wear the PPE that your employer requires you to use or wear to protect you while you do your job?
- Have you been provided training on the proper use of PPE and the limitations of the PPE?
- Do you know what to do if you have symptoms of COVID-19?

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*For Ontario residents, anyone who suspects that they have contracted COVID-19 should call 811 instead of going to the hospital or a family doctor.*

*911 should be called if you need immediate medical attention.*

*Direct toll-free phone numbers for Ontario residents are:*

*1-866-797-0000 or TTY: 1-866-797-0007*

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## SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL:

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>



Safe Environments  
Healthy Workers

[www.pshsa.ca](http://www.pshsa.ca)

## **TAKING CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/taking-care-mental-health.html>

## **TO CONTACT YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT:**

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx>

## **FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, REFER TO HEALTH CANADA'S WEBSITE ON COVID-19**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html?topic=tilelink>

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:**

- <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus> (Ontario COVID-19 webpage)
- [www.pshsa.ca/covid-19](http://www.pshsa.ca/covid-19)