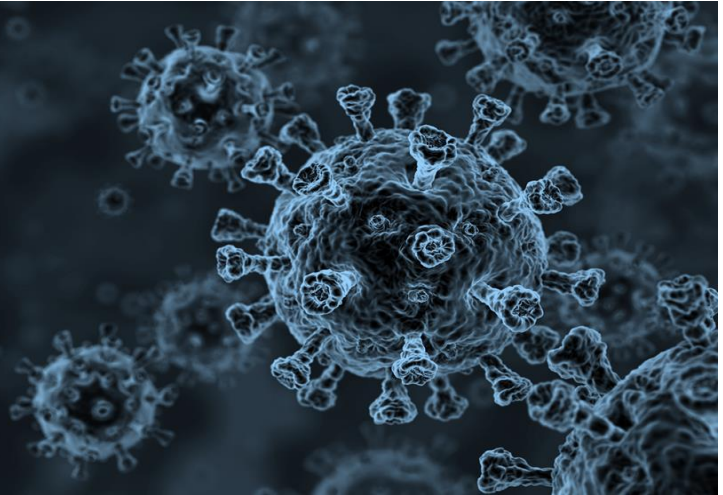




COVID-19: PRECAUTIONS WHEN WORKING AS A PARAMEDIC



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](#)

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 at least 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.
- 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.

BEST PRACTICES TO STAY HEALTHY AND SAFE

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.

The virus typically spreads through coughing and sneezing, personal contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then the face - mouth, nose, or eyes.

[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](#), may go to work but need to [self-isolate](#) when they are not at work.

Paramedics are at a greater risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to close physical contact with the public when responding to an emergency calls where they make direct contact with individuals. Additionally, exposure can also occur through touching possibly contaminated personal items such as mobile devices, documents, clothing, etc., and while attending emergency scenes.

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 OHS Act 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 OHS Act, 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 work
- 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 OHS Act, 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. Failure of the employer to comply with the OHS Act 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).
 - Ask screening questions of the patient or their family to assess any symptoms and travel history of the patient. Ensure that appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is being worn when dealing with the patient to limit exposure during close contact following the paramedic service policies regarding the use of PPE, and what to wear in each circumstance. This may include gloves, surgical mask, eye protection, and long sleeve gowns and respirators. A fluid-resistant N95 respirator should be used to perform aerosol-generating medical procedures.
 - Do not touch personal items of patients without appropriate PPE such as gloves.



- Actively monitor for yourself for any symptoms and report any change in health immediately to your supervisor.
 - Discuss with your employer any possible redistribution of tasks in case you have been exposed to the virus when responding to emergency calls
 - If physical distance and separation cannot be maintained, workers should have personal protective equipment (PPE) as required by their employer. Workers should be trained/employers must train workers on the proper use, care and limitations of any required PPE.
 - 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
 - Have staff work from home whenever possible (i.e. administrative staff)
 - Restricting visitors and limiting workplace entry to only essential personnel
 - Suspending all group activities and gatherings
 - Alter 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 start times, lunches and break times to reduce the number of employees 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 your organization's policies and Paramedic Practice documents for COVID-19 guidance including [Training Bulletin 120 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), [Guidance for Paramedic Services](#), and [COVID-19 Screening Tool for Paramedics](#). [Ministry of Health](#), [Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Government of Canada](#) also provide COVID-19 Guidance
 - Follow [Patient Care and Transportation Standards](#) information on Infection Prevention and Control
 - In addition to routine cleaning, [clean frequently](#) touched surfaces (i.e. steering wheels, door handles, handrails, 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.
 - Paramedics 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.



Where employees have travelled outside of Canada within the last 14 days and are seeking to return to work, it is important to balance the protection of the health system and the continued operation of these settings. Workers who have [travelled outside of Canada](#) within the last 14 days should self-isolate for a period of 14 days starting from their arrival in Ontario. Workers should not attend work if they are sick.

If returning to work after illness, workers should consult their [local public health unit](#) and their manager/occupational health and safety department to plan their safe return to work.

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. Conduct [active screening](#) before making patient contact from no closer than 2 metres (6 feet).
- Where possible use technology for communication (text messaging and mobile phones rather than in-person conversations)
- Avoid sharing equipment/supplies where possible. Disinfect regularly if sharing cannot be avoided, this includes disinfecting personal issue equipment (e.g. BP Cuffs) and shared equipment (e.g. radio, keyboard, phone) as needed and regularly. Disinfect your workspace at the start and end of your shift, and as often as necessary throughout.
- Limit any casual interactions that normally occur at work
- Bag and clean uniforms at the end of each shift. Do not store your street clothes and uniform in the same space unless both are clean.
- 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
- Avoid touching personal items of individuals without appropriate PPE such as gloves. Consider the gloves and anything touched with the gloves to be contaminated.

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 at least 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?
- Were you able to disinfect (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?
- Are you following patient care and transportation standards regarding infection prevention and control?
- Do you know who your [Designated Officer](#) is and do you have access to a Designated Officer 24/7?

For Ontario residents, anyone who suspects that they have contracted COVID-19 should call telehealth toll-free phone numbers for Ontario residents are: 1-866-797-0000 or TTY: 1-866-797-0007, Public Health, or family doctor. Only call 911 if you are severely ill.

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL:

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

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>

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

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
- 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

PUBLIC SERVICES HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSOCIATION

Access resources and information about COVID-19 at <https://www.pshsa.ca/covid-19>

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.