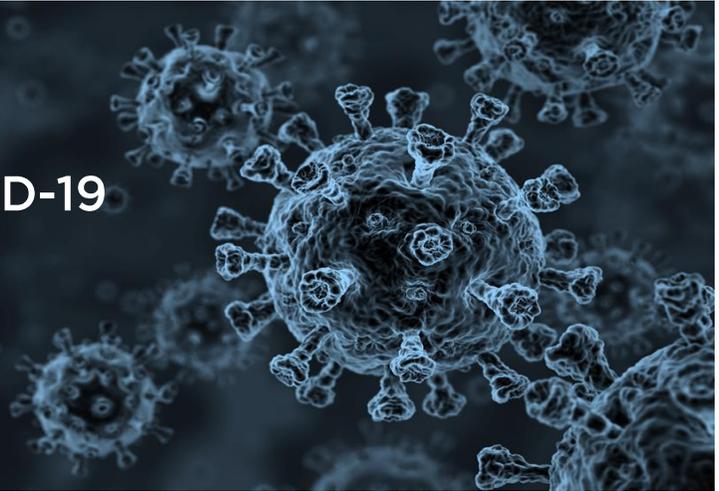




HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19 FOR FIREFIGHTERS



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

Coronaviruses are spread primarily 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 (with greater than 60% alcohol content).
- 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.
- Wash your hands and clothes as soon as you get home.
- If you are ill notify your supervisor immediately, complete the [self-assessment](#) and follow the instructions you receive.

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. If you think you have COVID-19 symptoms or have been in close contact with someone who has it, use this self-assessment tool to help determine next steps. You may also contact your primary care provider or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

The COVID-19 virus typically spreads through close personal contact with an infected person, or touching contaminated surfaces (e.g. medical equipment, door handles, hard surfaces etc.) and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

Firefighters are at a greater risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to close physical contact with the public when responding to an emergency or service call. This may include direct contact with individuals when inside their dwelling, as well as exposure while providing care or performing routine activities, other investigative responses and patient contact emergencies within dwellings, automobiles or other environments... Also, exposure can also happen through touching possibly contaminated personal items (such as mobile devices, documents, personal clothing, etc.) when interacting with individuals.

CONTROL

1. Follow the requirements set out in the Occupational Health and Safety Act as well as policies and procedures, including infectious disease preparedness and response plans established by your organization.

All workplace parties have roles and responsibilities 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
- Union if applicable

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

- Comply 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 Ontario law, workers have the [right to refuse unsafe work](#). Note that members of Fire Service have a limited right to refuse work (OHSA s43 (1)(2)). If a circumstance described in the grounds for refusing work (OHSA s43(3)) are inherent in the work, or a normal condition of employment, and for which training and equipment have been provided, the worker may not refuse.

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.

Follow the infectious disease preparedness and response plans established by the organization. The plan considers and addresses levels of risk associated with the workplace and job tasks. This includes how the site will [operate](#) during the pandemic including but not limited to health and safety considerations such as sanitization of sites, how employees [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. By maintaining physical distancing you are less likely to be exposed to a respiratory virus. Physical distancing may not be possible when performing certain tasks and PPE may be required.
3. **Update routine activities with additional safety steps:** This includes
 - Ask screening questions from the individual or their family to assess any symptoms and travel history in the individual and ensure that appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is being worn to limit exposure during close contact. This may include disposable gloves, appropriate respirator, coveralls, and goggles or face shields. Ensure appropriate PPE is selected based on interaction risk assessment, if possible.
 - Do not touch personal items without appropriate PPE, such as gloves.
 - Actively monitor for yourself for any symptoms and report any change in health immediately to your supervisor.



4. **Do not enter a high-risk location, such as a long-term care facility or a group home**, if you have been exposed to the virus in the last 14 days. Discuss with employer any possible redistribution of tasks in case you have been exposed to the virus when responding to emergency calls. .
5. **Follow specific guidance for health and safety and infection prevention and control practices.**
 - Refer to [Public Health Ontario Evidence Brief for First Responders](#) for COVID-19 Guidance as well as your organizational policies. General resources and guidelines are available from the Ontario [Ministry of Health](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#).
 - [Wash hands](#) frequently with soap and water
 - Proper [donning](#) and [doffing](#) of PPE and hand hygiene should be performed.
6. **Stay home if you are feeling ill** or meet the requirement for [self-isolation](#) due to travel or exposure. If you detect symptoms, you should immediately distance yourself from others and go home. If possible, avoid using public transit. Ensure you notify your supervisor so that they are aware of the situation and can also notify others who may have been exposed.
7. **Demonstrate the following precautionary measures while working:**
 - Do not report to work if you are exhibiting any of the symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Limit the amount of face-to-face contact during work activities such as station duties and hand-overs and practice physical distancing
 - Conduct [active screening](#) at the beginning of an interaction with members of the public when a firefighter is required to be closer than 2 metres (6 feet).
 - Confirm if patient contact is required then have one firefighter [don Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#) for droplet and contact precautions and attend to the patient.
 - Consider PAPR or SCBA to conserve N95 in the case of shortages
 - Approach patient from rear (if possible) and place a paper surgical mask on them (protection for you) or an O2 mask if required.
 - Perform Primary/Secondary Survey, determine if you require assistance from crew and proceed with patient care as required.
 - Avoid exposing multiple firefighters at scene where possible
 - Upon completion of patient care [doff Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#) and follow decontamination procedures at scene prior to entering response vehicle.
 - Complete decontamination and hazardous waste procedures at station post call.
 - Firefighters are recommended to have spare clothing/uniforms at work.
 - Disinfect personal issue equipment and shared equipment (when sharing equipment is unavoidable), such as apparatus, radio, keyboard and phone as needed and regularly.
 - Disinfect your work space at the start and end of your shifts, and as often as necessary throughout.
 - Bag and clean clothing/uniforms at the end of each incident/shift. Do not store your street clothes and spare clothes/uniform in same space unless both are clean.
 - Be vigilant for frequently used surfaces and objects that could be potentially contaminated (such as ID badges, phone, keys, etc.).



- Change clothing at work and bag your clothes if there is no onsite laundry. If a workplace supplied uniform and laundry are not an option, set up a decontamination station at home that you can use immediately on arrival at home.
- Avoid physical contact with people who have flu-like symptoms.
- Instruct dispatched or mobile staff to avoid interactions with others at restaurants, truck stops, repair shops, driver lounges, etc.
- Use technology for communication (text messaging and mobile phones rather than in-person conversations). Limit any casual interactions that normally occur at work
- Prevent transmission by closely following routine practices and additional precautions
- Report and document exposures with your Designated Officer and utilize Emergency Authority to obtain COVID-19 positive status information about individuals with whom they are coming into contact

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 the time. Find out [helpful tips and coping strategies](#).

8. Practice stringent hand hygiene. Public Health Ontario recommends following basic hygiene practices:

- [Wash hands](#) frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- If using [hand sanitizers](#), they must be alcohol-based (with greater than 60% alcohol) to be effective
- Avoid touching your face
- 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.

ASK AND EVALUATE:

- Were the proper hygiene facilities (on scene and in the station) available to you?
- Were you able to practice physical distancing?
- Did you have the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) you require to protect you while you do your job?
- Have you been provided training on the proper use of PPE?
- Do you know what to do if you have symptoms?
- Are you aware of emergency risks in your region and how to be prepared as the situation evolves?

For Ontario residents, anyone who suspects that they have contracted COVID-19 should call 811 (NOT 911) instead of going to the hospital or a family doctor. Direct toll-free phone numbers for Ontario residents are: 1-866-797-0000 or TTY: 1-866-797-0007

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL:

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



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"



Safe Environments
Healthy Workers

www.pshsa.ca

- 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.