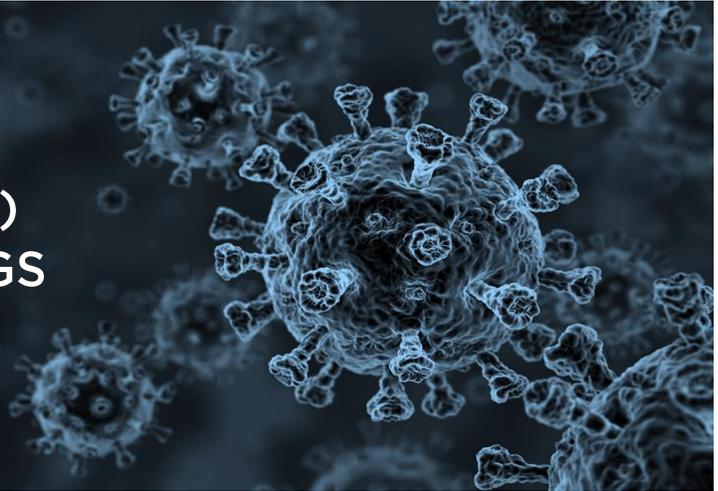




# COVID-19: PRECAUTIONS WHEN WORKING AS A NURSE (RN, RPN AND NP) IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS



## 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, local Public Health Unit and employer and follow instructions about [staying home](#) or away from public spaces to prevent the spread of the virus.

All health system employees should diligently monitor themselves for signs of illness over the course of the pandemic and identify themselves to their manager and/or occupational health and safety department if they feel unwell. If a health worker begins to feel unwell while at work, they should immediately don a surgical mask and notify their manager and/or occupational health and safety department.

### 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 and/or 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 OHS, employers have the duty to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances 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 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 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 has minimal or no symptoms (asymptomatic).
  - Physical distancing may not be possible when providing care, but it can be practiced with colleagues when not providing care.
  - If unable to maintain physical distancing, nurses who are not providing care to suspected or confirmed COVID patients (working in setting other than hospitals and long term care homes) 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.
  - Have staff work from home whenever possible (i.e. administrative staff).
  - Stagger start times, breaks and lunches.
  - Restrict visitors and limit workplace entry to only essential personnel.
  - Suspend 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.
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 COVID-19 Guidance for the Health Sector document](#), [Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Government of Canada](#) for current and approved practices for the Health Sector.



- Perform established droplet and contact precautions in when providing care to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients. Refer to [PIDAC's Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in All Health Care Settings, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed document](#).
  - Review and follow where applicable all other precautions, including for aerosol-generating medical procedures (N95 respirators are required for aerosol generating medical procedures).
  - Use Guidance for the Health Sector and appropriate controls when treating suspected cases such as putting a mask on the patient, promoting hand hygiene, placing patients in negative pressure isolation rooms or if one is not available, in a private room with the door kept closed. Administrative controls include restricting the number of personnel entering the room and having proper training about the appropriate use of PPE (gloves, gown, mask or respirator, eye protection, face shield).
  - Follow PIDAC guidance on proper cleaning protocols for environmental contamination. Ensure patient-contact surfaces are frequently sanitized such as examination tables, chairs, thermometer, BP cuff, waiting areas, and door handles.
  - Be familiar with local testing locations and their specific protocols.
  - Consider items that could serve as fomites (inanimate objects that can carry infection), such as ID badge and loose items that come into contact with potentially contaminated surfaces.
  - Change clothing at work and bag your clothes if there is no onsite laundry (if available- wear hospital/workplace scrubs). 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.
  - In addition to routine cleaning, [clean frequently](#) touched surfaces (i.e. 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.
  - 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. 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.
  - [Practice droplet and contact precautions](#) when physical contact with people who have COVID-like symptoms.
  - Work with your manager and scheduling to establish flexible work hours or alternative hours, 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.
  - 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 Employee Health or 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](#).

5. 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% or greater alcohol content.
  - 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?

## 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



Safe Environments  
Healthy Workers

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

## 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.