



# COVID-19: PRECAUTIONS WHEN WORKING AS A HOUSEKEEPING AND LAUNDRY IN HEALTHCARE



## 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).
- Wear a mask or face covering when in an indoor public place.
- 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 the [Government of Ontario](#), 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, muscle aches, fatigue, headache, sore throat, runny nose, 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 and follow instructions about staying home or away from public spaces to prevent the spread of the virus.

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. It is important to check with your healthcare provider or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 and follow instructions about staying home or away from public spaces to prevent the spread of the virus.

The COVID-19 virus typically spreads through close contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then the mouth, nose, or eyes.

Close contact with a potentially infected person or touching potentially contaminated items (such as tables, door handles, hard surfaces or linens etc.) are likely to pose the greatest exposure risks. Also, close contact with other people increases the risk of exposure to someone who may be infected.

### CONTROLS

1. **Follow your workplace safety plan and any infectious disease preparedness and response plan established by your 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 social distancing, and how work will be scheduled.

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 or
- Union if applicable

Under Section 28(1) of the OHS Act, 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 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

Workers also 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.

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.

Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) that protects your eyes, nose and mouth (surgical/procedure mask and goggles or face shield) if:

- a. you are required to come within 2 metres of another person who is not wearing a mask or face covering in a manner that covers that person's mouth, nose and chin in an indoor area and,
- b. if you are not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier from a person.

Workers must use 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. Customers/clients/visitors may be asked to wear a face covering (non-medical or cloth mask) to protect those around them.

3. **Follow specific guidance for health and safety and infection prevention and control practices.**

- Refer to the [Ministry of Health, Public Health Ontario](#), the [Ontario Healthcare Housekeeping Association \(OHHA\)](#), [Health Canada](#) and your organizational policies for COVID-19 Guidance.
- Increase frequency of cleaning high-touch surfaces with cleaning products registered in Canada with Drug Identification Number (DIN) and labelled as a broad-spectrum virucide at least twice daily and when soiled.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions and Safety Data Sheet requirements for proper use of cleaning and disinfecting products. Particular attentions should be paid to contact time, dilution, material compatibility, shelf-life, storage, first aid, and PPE.
- Adhere to the organization's terminal cleaning protocol for cleaning of patient rooms after discharge, transfer or discontinuation of contact and droplet precautions. See Provincial



Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee ([PIDAC Best Practices](#)) and [PHO](#) for more details on current environmental cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

- Cleaning equipment itself requires careful and regular cleaning and disinfection to avoid inadvertent cross-transmission of microorganisms during subsequent use. If equipment barriers are used, ensure they are removed and discarded between uses.
  - All used linen should be handled with care to avoid dispersal of microorganisms into the environment and to avoid contact with staff clothing.
  - Linen used for a person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 should be managed as heavily soiled linen and placed in an alginate bag and then into an appropriate laundry receptacle at the point of generation.
  - Long-sleeved fluid-resistant gown and disposable gloves should be worn during handling of soiled linen.
  - Laundry and housekeeping workers should wear personal protective equipment ([PPE](#)) that is appropriate for the task being undertaken.
  - Proper [donning and doffing of PPE](#) and hand hygiene should be performed.
  - Be familiar with [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 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.
4. **Stay home if you are feeling ill** or meet the requirement for [self-isolation](#) due to travel or exposure. Comply with screening protocols at your workplace and actively [monitor yourself](#) for any symptoms and 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.
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
  - Use technology for communication (text messaging and mobile phones rather than in-person conversations).
  - Limit any casual interactions that normally occur at work.
  - Work with your manager and dispatch to establish flexible work hours or alternative hours where possible.
6. **Practice stringent [hand hygiene](#).** Public Health Ontario recommends following basic hygiene practices:
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 15-20 seconds
  - If using hand sanitizers, they must be alcohol based (with 70% alcohol) to be effective
  - Avoid touching your face
  - Sneeze or cough into 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 (handwashing equipment) available to you?
- Were you able to practice social 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 prepare for different situations?

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*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*

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## 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”
- 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.