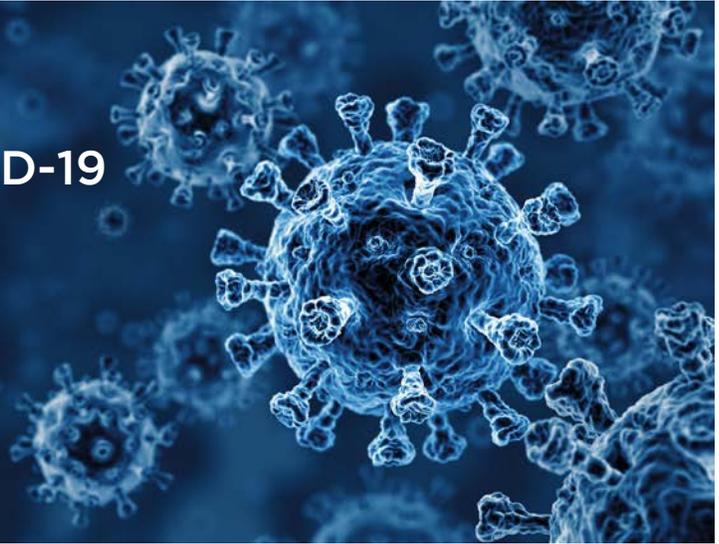# HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19 FOR HOME CARE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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

The health and safety of workers is a top concern amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, all parties must place an increased focus on health and safety in order to protect the health and safety of workers and to keep home and community care operations running and safe.

Close contact with a potentially infected person or touching potentially contaminated items (such as equipment, tables, door handles, hard surfaces, etc.) are likely to pose the greatest exposure risks.

All measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should be done in compliance with requirements under the OHSA and its regulations and the applicable public health directives issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

In addition, below are a set of resources, tips and best practices to help employers prevent the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces.

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND CO-WORKERS-GENERAL GUIDANCE

The virus typically spreads through coughing and sneezing, close 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.
- Wear a mask or face covering when in an indoor public place.
- 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 greater than 60% 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.
- Implement regular cleaning and disinfection (see environmental cleaning and disinfection)
- Minimize contact with people who are sick and ensure controls are in place for the protection of workers.

- Instruct workers to stay home if they are sick.
- Wash your hands and clothes as soon as you get home.
- Instruct staff who have symptoms or think they were exposed to COVID-19, to notify their supervisor immediately, complete the self-assessment and follow the instructions provided.

ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AND INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL PLAN

All workplaces in Ontario should develop a safety plan that includes at a minimum how they will implement key health and safety measures such as screening, physical distancing, masks or face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, and the wearing of personal protective equipment. Establishan infectious disease preparedness and response plan. The plan should follow recommendations in guidance notes from the Ministry of Health and directives from Public Health Ontario. The plan should consider and address levels of risk associated with the workplace and job tasks. This includes how the specific location of the health care and residential settings will operate during and throughout the recovery phase following the pandemic including sanitization of the workplace, procurement of equipment and resources for the home community care setting, how employees report illness, how to ensure physical distancing and how work will be scheduled.

To access the most recent Ministry of Health guidance notes please visit and scroll down to find your relevant sector information:
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx

A list of activities and links to relevant resources to provide support in this area are listed below:

- Care providers should be delaying care if possible and providing only essential medical services.
- Establish a system for active screening. All patients and clients should be screened by telephone before appointments are scheduled. Staff should ask about any other person (e.g. family member) who will be in the home during the appointment and where appropriate, screen this person as well.
- Workplaces shall implement this screening for any workers or essential visitors entering the work environment. Screening should occur before or when a worker enters the workplace at the beginning of their day or shift, or when an essential visitor arrives. At a minimum, the questions outlined by the Chief Medical Officer of Health should be used to screen individuals for COVID-19 before they are permitted entry into the workplace (business or organization). The tool may be adapted based on need and the specific setting.
- If either the patient or other person in the home screens positive, staff should call the local public health unit to discuss the most appropriate setting for clinical assessment.
- Staff must follow Routine Practices and Additional Precautions at all times.
- If physical distance and separation cannot be maintained, workers should have personal protective equipment (PPE) consisting of surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (goggles or face shield).

- 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.
- The patient/client should be instructed to wear a face covering (non-medical or cloth mask) to protect those around them and a procedure mask (if tolerated) while care is being provided if they are a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.
- Ensure availability of hand hygiene materials and proper use of PPE for Droplet/Contact precautions (gown, gloves, mask/respirator, and eye protection) if visiting the home of a suspected or confirmed case.
- When an employer determines personal protective equipment (PPE) is required for contact/droplet precautions (gown, gloves, mask/respirator and eye protection), workers must be trained on its use, care, limitations and fit testing must be completed if respirators are required.
- If a patient/client is referred to a hospital, staff should coordinate with local public health authorities, paramedic services and hospitals to make safe arrangements for travel if a patient/client is symptomatic for COVID-19.
- Institute measures to physically separate or impose physical distance of at least 2 metres between persons. This could be done by use of physical partitions, visual cues or signage to limit close contact.
  - Require all persons entering the workplace to wear a mask or face covering in a manner that covers their mouth, nose and chin during any period when they are in the indoor area(unless exempted).
- Provide training to workers on COVID-19, how it spreads, risk of exposure, including those who may be at higher risk (i.e. have underlying health conditions) and procedures to follow including reporting process, proper hand washing practices and other routine infection control precautions.
- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home, ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance. Communicate these policies to employees.
- Based on risk of exposure, consider implementing a process for containing and laundering work clothing.   Alternatively, advise workers to practice good laundry hygiene practices with their clothing as it could potentially be a source of contamination.
- Have a system for reporting probable and confirmed cases to the local Public Health unit. Communication about who will take responsibility, ensuring proper documentation, and implementing any advice given by the Public Health unit is critical for containing the spread of COVID-19.
- Assign staff to dedicated work areas as much as possible. Discourage them from sharing phones, desks, offices and other tools and equipment.
- Limit the exchange of papers (e.g. signing contracts). If documents must be exchanged, leave them on a clean surface while maintaining a two-metre distance. Avoid sharing pens and office equipment. Disinfect after each use.
- Be familiar with local testing locations and their specific protocols.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

As advised by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, public health officials, and outlined throughout government communications, physical distancing is required to control the spread of COVID-19. Physical distancing generally means maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) or more between persons. By maintaining physical distancing, people are less likely to be exposed to a respiratory virus like COVID-19 as the virus can be spread before symptoms appear (pre-symptomatic) and when persons may have contracted the virus but are minimal or no symptoms (asymptomatic).

In order to ensure physical distancing in the workplace, employers should consider:

- Instruct clients/residents to wear a face covering (non-medical or cloth mask) to protect those around them and a procedure mask (if tolerated) while the care worker is providing care
- Provide workers with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) that protects the eyes, nose and mouth(surgical/procedure mask and goggles or face shield) if:

  they 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,
  if they not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier from a person.

- Delay care if possible and only provide essential medical services
- Instruct staff on how to coordinate the day to day operations to align with new physical distancing measures i.e only allowing the person receiving care to be present
- 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)
- Staggered start times, breaks and lunches
- 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 lunch and break times to reduce the number of employees gathering.
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ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

While employers always have an obligation to maintain clean workplaces, that obligation is under sharper focus during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The COVID-19 virus can survive for several days on different surfaces and objects. Frequent cleaning and disinfection is important to prevent spread of the disease. Many common household and commercial disinfectant products will destroy the COVID-19 virus. Some disinfectants will have an eight-digit Drug

Identification Number (DIN). These products are approved for use by Health Canada. Refer to the Public Health Ontario Fact Sheet for Environmental cleaning for more details.

Employers should focus on:

- Easy access to soap and water (ways to properly clean hands) or alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of washroom facilities at office sites.
- Posting signage on hygiene in English and majority languages in the workplace so everyone can understand how to do their part respecting hygiene practices.
- Sanitizing of commonly touched surfaces or areas (e.g. door handles, light switches, toilet handles, counters, work surfaces, equipment) twice a day and when visibly soiled

REPORTING ILLNESS

The symptoms of COVID-19 are shared with many other illnesses including the cold and flu. At this time, it is recommended that anyone who begins to feel unwell (fever, new cough or difficulty breathing) should return home and self-isolate immediately. If you are a caregiver, have a household member, or a contact of someone who has COVID-19 you should follow the guidance from public health on self-isolation.

People who are self-isolating should seek clinical assessment over the phone - either by calling their primary care provider's office or Telehealth Ontario   1-866-797-0000. If you need additional assessment, your primary care provider or Telehealth Ontario will direct you to in-person care options.

Anyone who has travelled outside of Canada within the last 14 days should self-isolate upon return from travel and should not go to work. Workers who have travelled and are part of workplaces that are essential to daily living are able to return to work as long as they do not have symptoms. However, they should self-monitor for a period of 14 days and identify themselves to their employer so that a plan can be put into place to ensure the protection of those workplaces.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND WORKPLACE SAFETY & INSURANCE BOARD REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The OHSA requires an employer to provide a written notice within four days of being advised that a worker has an occupational illness (including COVID-19) from exposure in the workplace or if a claim has been made to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) by or on behalf of the worker with respect to an occupational illness, including an occupational infection, to the:

- Ministry of Labour;
- Joint health and safety committee (or health and safety representative); and
- Trade union, if any.

For more information: Occupational Illness: Requirements to Report to the Ministry of Labour

Any instances of occupationally-acquired illnesses shall be reported to WSIB within 72 hours of receiving notification of said illness.

SHARE INFORMATION

It is important that all parties in a workplace understand their roles and responsibilities. Employers need to ensure health and safety policies are updated and posted for all employees to see. Using industry resources, including this one and those produced by Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA), the Ministry of Health, and Public Health Ontario will improve workplace understanding.

POST YOUR POLICIES

All employers need to post and communicate COVID-19 policies to employees. These policies should cover how the workplace will operate, including but not limited to:

- The sanitization of workplaces
- How work will be scheduled including screening, physical distancing, the use of masks and PPE
- How workers and contractors report illnesses

All businesses should have a workplace illness policy. If a policy does not currently exist or does not align with COVID-19 recommendations, the following should be included: Sick employees must stay home or be sent home from work; For employees housed in workplace accommodations, sick employees must be confined to their rooms until cleared for re-entry into the workforce; Sick employees should use the self-assessment tool for COVID-19 and follow the subsequent directions; When employees go home sick, their work areas must be cleaned and disinfected.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (MLTSD) REQUIREMENTS

The MLTSD is focused on providing enhanced protections for workers. Effective March 19, 2020, the Employment Standards Act was amended to provide job protected leaves for employees affected by COVID-19.

TRACK AND MONITOR YOUR WORKFORCE

Due to the latency period of COVID-19, it is important to track where workers have worked, where possible. If a worker tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will ask employers to provide information on where the worker worked as well as the contact information of any other worker who may have been exposed.

EVALUATE

Ask and evaluate:

- Was the proper handwashing equipment made available?
- Were physical distancing measures implemented?
- Was the PPE required to protect staff while doing their job available?
- Was training on the proper use of PPE provided?
- Did staff know what to do if they had symptoms? Did they follow the recommended protocols?

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.