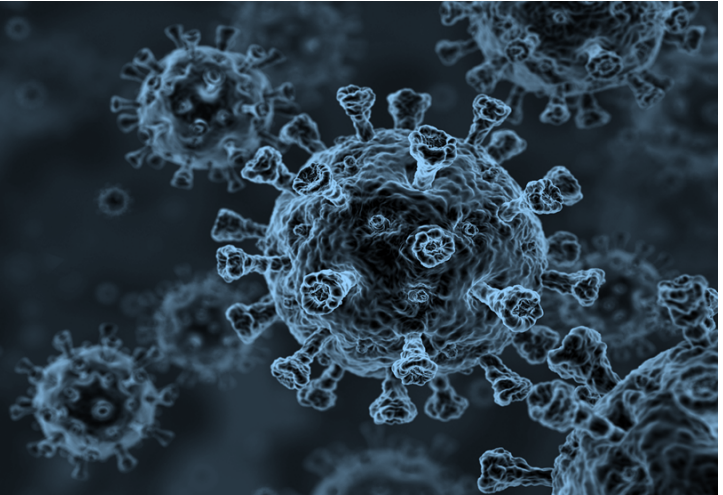




COVID-19: PRECAUTIONS WHEN WORKING AS AN OPTOMETRIST



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.

You should also regularly check for requirements applicable to your region, such as:

- the provincial COVID-19 Response Framework
- municipal bylaws
- orders from your local public health unit

To help prevent outbreaks, you are encouraged to develop a COVID-19 workplace safety plan. All businesses operating in a region in lockdown are required to have one under provincial regulation.

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 general [helpful tips](#) to help prevent the spread of germs:



- Maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) or more between persons, including patients and co-workers.
- You must use a face covering (non-medical mask, such as a cloth mask) in public indoor spaces (unless exempted) Wash your hands often with soap and water alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60-90% 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 high-touch areas, where possible, and ensure you clean your hands after.
- Practice regular cleaning and disinfection
- Minimize 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 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.

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, close contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then your face - mouth, nose, or eyes.

Close contact with patients or touching potentially contaminated items (such as door handles, handrails, taps, touch screens, counter tops, equipment and other hard surfaces often touched by patients) are likely to pose the greatest exposure risks.

The first step to controlling risks in a workplace is to identify the risks. This applies to all workplace hazards, not just COVID-19. Identifying and controlling workplace hazards is required of all employers in Ontario under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations. The key risk factors for COVID-19 transmission include:

- prolonged exposure - spending more time with potentially infected people
- close proximity - working close to others
- crowded places - having more people in a space
- closed spaces - indoor spaces with less fresh air exchange (working indoors is riskier than working outdoors)



- forceful exhalation - activities that cause people to breath more deeply, such as exercise, speaking loudly and singing

It is possible for COVID-19 to be spread by people who do not have any symptoms. This makes effective control measures very important. We must act as if everyone is infected when setting up controls. The risk of severe health outcomes is not the same for all workers. The risk increases with age and is higher for people with certain medical conditions.

CONTROL

1. Follow the requirements set out in the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) as well as policies and procedures included in the 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 [Occupational Health and Safety Act \(OHSA\)](#) and its regulations, and the Directives from the Chief Medical Officer of Health can be found [here](#).

Workers should raise any concerns to their:

- Employer or 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 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 which may endanger themselves or another worker
- 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 OHSA, 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 of Labour, Training and Skills Development's Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008. Failure of the employer to comply with the OHSA 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.

Follow your workplace safety plan and any infectious disease preparedness and response plans established by the employer should be followed. The plan 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 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.
 - Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) that protects your eyes, nose and mouth (surgical/procedure mask and goggles or face shield) if:
 - you are required to come within 2 metres of another person and,
 - if you are not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier from a person.
 - Non-essential or elective operations may need to be altered or postponed to maintain physical distancing (e.g. urgent care only). Patients should be provided with an alternate means of contact (e.g., by phone or email) for urgent cases
 - Consider modifications to services related to product pick-up or prescription renewals (i.e. ship directly to patient or curb side pickup)
 - 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, meal, and break times.
 - Restricting visitors and limiting workplace entry to only essential personnel
 - Suspending all in-person 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 and should be well-ventilated. Consider staggered lunch 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 the [Ontario Ministry of Health, Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Government of Canada](#) for COVID-19 Guidance
 - Increase frequency of , [cleaning](#) high-touch surfaces (i.e. door handles, handrails, customer service counters, touch screens, elevator buttons, etc.) with cleaning products registered in Canada with Drug Identification Number (DIN) or WHMIS label at least twice daily and when visibly dirty. Allow adequate contact time according to the manufacturer's instructions. Optometrists 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. Return to Work after travel or illness. Stay home if you are feeling ill. Comply with screening protocols at your workplace and actively [monitor yourself](#) for any symptoms. If you detect symptoms, you should immediately distance yourself from others and go home. If possible, avoiding 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.

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.
 - Where physical distancing cannot be maintained follow your employer's health and safety measures and procedures
 - Use technology for communication (text messaging and mobile phones rather than in-person conversations)
 - Avoid sharing equipment/supplies (i.e. phones, desks, offices, and other tools and equipment) 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 limitations or accommodations related to any underlying medical conditions that might place you at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 with your employer

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 60-90% 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?
- Are you disinfecting (i.e. disposable wipes) frequently touched surfaces routinely?
- Did you have the Personal Protective Equipment (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?
- Do you know what to do if you have symptoms of COVID-19?

For Ontario residents, anyone who suspects that they have contracted COVID-19 should call Telehealth Ontario (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/TAKING CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19](https://COVID-19.ONTARIO.CA/SELF-ASSESSMENT/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

COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS OF ONTARIO

Access resources and information about COVID-19. <https://www.collegeoptom.on.ca/resources/covid-19-and-optometry-care/>



Safe Environments
Healthy Workers

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.