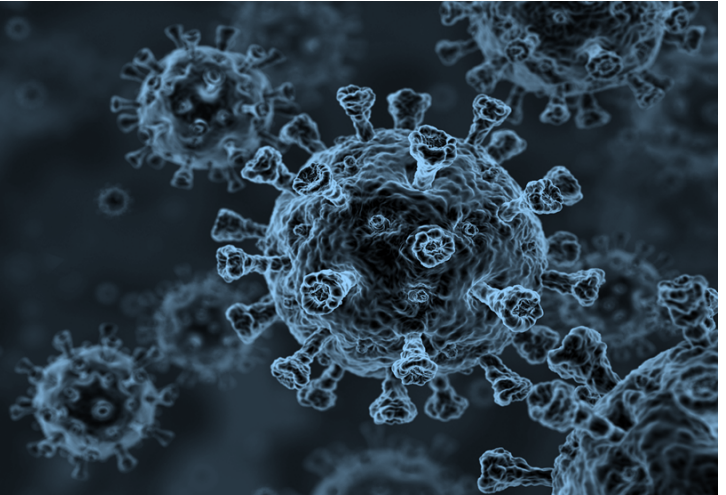




COVID-19: PRECAUTIONS WHEN WORKING AS A DISPATCHER WORKER



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 workers 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](#)

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PROTECTING YOURSELF AND CO-WORKERS

The virus typically spreads through coughing and sneezing, personal contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then face – mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands. 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 shifts, and before preparing food or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with 60-90% 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.
- Practice regular cleaning and disinfection.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- 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.

Close contact with coworkers and adjacent work areas are common in dispatch centres. Touching dispatch consoles, touch screens, headsets, phones and workstation surfaces or other potentially contaminated items (such as pens, chair controls, door handles and other hard surfaces often touched by coworkers) are likely to pose the greatest exposure risks. In general, close contact with other people increases the risk of exposure to someone who may be already infected.

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

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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, 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.

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 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 OHSA, 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 workplace health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can file a complaint with

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the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development's Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008.

Follow the infectious disease preparedness and response plans established by your employer. The plan should address 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 have minimal or no symptoms (asymptomatic). Take the time to assess your work area and look for ways to minimize those risks within your workplace.

In order to ensure physical distancing in the workplace, mandatory implementation of:

- Using plexi-glass dividers between console positions
 - Reserving headsets and keyboards for personal use, and avoid sharing devices and equipment whenever possible
 - Implement all measures to ensure physical distance and separation between people.
 - Provide workers with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) that protects the eyes, nose and mouth (surgical/procedure mask and goggles or face shield) if:
 - workers are required to come within 2 metres of another person,
 - if workers 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.
 - Limiting the total number of staff at the workplace and where they are assigned to work
 - Postponing non-essential face-to-face appointments or converting them to virtual appointments
 - Working from home whenever possible (i.e., administrative staff)
 - Staggering start times, breaks and lunches
 - Restricting visitors and limiting workplace entry to only essential personnel
 - Suspending all group activities and gatherings
 - Altering the workplace layout of the floor by moving furniture or using visual cues such as tape on the floor to enhance physical distancing. Arranging lunchrooms and break rooms 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, Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Government of Canada](#) for COVID-19 Guidance

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- 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.
 - Dispatch workers 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. Self-monitor for illness. Stay home if you are feeling ill. 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 to get home. 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:
- You must use a [face covering](#) (non-medical mask, such as a cloth mask) in public indoor spaces (unless exempted)
 - 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
 - Use technology for communication (text messaging and mobile phones) rather than in-person conversations
 - Avoid sharing equipment/supplies (i.e., headsets, keyboards, pens and note pads) where possible. Disinfect regularly if sharing cannot be avoided
 - Ensure timely disinfection of all equipment. Allow adequate contact time according to the manufacturer's instructions
 - 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
 - Discuss any underlying medical conditions that might place you at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 with your 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](#).

6. Practice stringent hand hygiene practices. Health Canada recommends following basic hygiene practices:
- Wash hands frequently

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- 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 with 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 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>

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

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- 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* (OHS) 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.