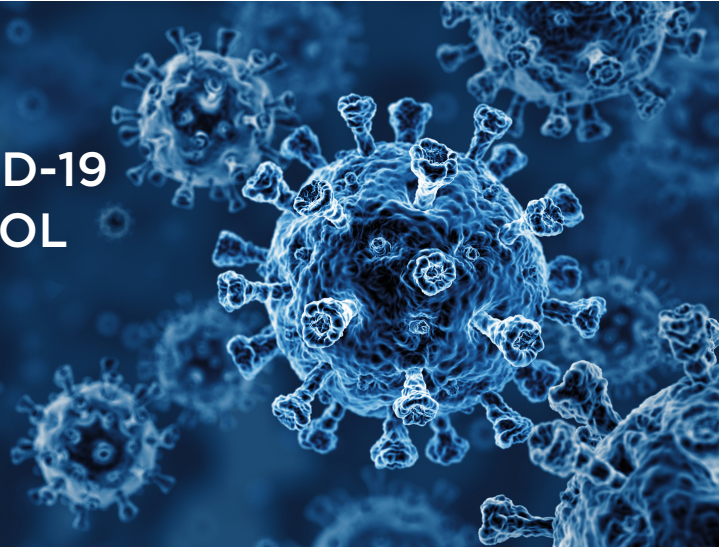




HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19 FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EMPLOYERS



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](#)



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:

- Provide information and training to worker about COVID-19 (signs and symptoms) and what to do if they have been exposed or experiencing symptoms.
- Practice physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) or more between persons, including students, their parents and co-workers. (see Physical Distancing)
- 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 for at least 20 seconds, when hands are visibly soiled, before and after any breaks, at the beginning and end of their shift, before preparing food, etc. or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% - 90% alcohol content) if hand washing is not possible.
 - Sneeze and cough into your sleeve.
 - Discard immediately any tissue you use and wash your hands afterward.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
 - 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 other workers.
- Instruct workers to stay home if they are sick.
- Encourage workers to wash their clothes as soon as they get home.
- Self monitor for illness
- 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. They may also visit [an assessment center](#) to get a COVID-19 test.

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.



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 breathe 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.

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

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. Establish an infectious disease preparedness and response plan. The plan should follow recommendations in [guidance notes](#) from the [Ministry of Health](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#). The plan should consider and address levels of risk associated with the workplace and job tasks within Elementary Schools including teachers, custodial staff, teaching assistants and office administration staff. This includes how the Elementary School will operate during and throughout the recovery phase following the pandemic including sanitization of the workplace, equipment and resources, how workers 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 is provided below:

- 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.
- Conduct RACE (Recognize, Assess, Control and Evaluate) analysis to determine any additional controls that may be applicable.
- Contact your Public Services Health and Safety Association ([PSHSA consultant](#)) for further assistance. **For more information refer to Public Health, the Ministry of Education, and School Board Policies and Guidance Documents**
- Establish a system for [screening](#) for both staff and students. Parents should check their children's temperature daily before coming to the school setting. Anyone with a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius (100.4 F) or higher, and/or experiencing any cold-like symptoms or vomiting and/or diarrhea should stay home.
- Pick-up and drop-off of students should happen outside the school setting, unless it is necessary for the parent/guardian to enter the school.
- Deny entry to school to any person who has signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection; or anyone who has travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days.
- If a student begins to experience symptoms of COVID-19 while attending school, they must be immediately separated from others in a supervised area until they can go home. Anyone attending to the student should maintain a distance of 2 metres, if not possible, at minimum the student and staff member should wear a surgical/procedure mask (if tolerated). Contact surfaces should be disinfected as soon as possible.
 - 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).
- Students and workers who have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 or symptomatic person(s), should be excluded from the school setting for 14 days.
- Implement sick leave policies and [coverage](#) for workers who may be self-isolating or are un-well.
- If PPE is required, provide information and training on doffing, donning, use, care and limitations of PPE and disposal.
- Take steps to raise awareness of proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette.
- Enhance [hand hygiene](#) practices for both staff and students.
 - Before touching face (eyes, nose, mouth)
 - After coughing, sneezing or wiping nose
 - Upon arrival in the morning and before departure each day;
 - Before and after eating;
 - After handling something that is frequently touched;



- When entering and exiting the premises and after each use of collective equipment
- Consider hand sanitizer stations at the entrance to the school and classrooms
- Clean and disinfect objects, toys, and other high-touch surfaces (e.g. door handles, light switches, table tops, desks, etc.) at least twice a day using disinfectants that have a Drug Identification Number.
- Wherever possible elementary school students are to be kept in the same group, in the same rooms, at the same desk, and the staff should always have the same group of pupils.
- Students should take their meals in one place on the premises, i.e. in the classrooms or outdoors, to avoid movements within the school facility.
- Clean meal areas before each meal and disinfect them daily
 - The refrigerator door handle,
 - Chairs & chair backs
 - Microwaves
 - Tables
- Discourage students and staff from sharing sports water bottles, phones, desks, offices and other tools and equipment.
- Multi-use utensils or equipment such as musical instrument pieces should be cleaned and disinfected per standard practice. If possible students should have their own equipment.
- Assign staff to dedicated work areas as much as possible.
- Respect the maximum ratio of elementary school students per room for the school facilities prescribed by the Ministry of Education;
- Place posters or other signage in high traffic areas:
 - Asking staff, students and visitors to stay home if they have symptoms (fever, cough or difficulty breathing)
 - Encouraging good respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and other healthy practices at all times and at the entrance to the workplace. Consider hand sanitizer stations at entrances where possible. Utilize remote work for workers wherever and whenever possible.
- 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.
- 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 workers to stay home, ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance. Communicate these policies to workers.
- Based on risk of exposure, consider implementing a process for containing and laundering work clothing and classroom materials (e.g. towels, blankets, rugs, etc.). Alternatively, advise workers to practice good laundry hygiene practices with their own 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 and, where required by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. 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. permission forms for students, parent/teacher interview schedules, etc.) and utilize electronic transmission where possible between teachers and parents. If hard copy 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.
- Schedule visits to eliminate people gathering in reception areas.
- JK- Grade 3:
 - Young students must not share food or other items that may go into the mouth (e.g., bottles, cups, snacks etc.).
 - Request parents to have students use their own sealable water bottles, clearly marked with the student's name, and refill those bottles while at school with adult assistance to avoid contamination as much as possible.
 - Avoid sensory play for young students (e.g. water or sand activities, use of play-dough, math manipulatives, etc.)
 - Remove toys for young students that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g. avoid plush toys).
 - Remove area rugs in classrooms if cleaning is not easily achieved.
 - If there is a need to comfort a young student in an extenuating circumstance, use blankets or cloths that can easily be washed over the staff members' clothing.
 - Staff in contact with preschool students, students with disabilities or vocational education where it is necessary to be less than 2 metres from another person without a physical barrier, must wear personal protective equipment appropriate in the circumstances at all times
 - 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

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:

- Staggering schedules to reduce movement within the school and to limit the number of instances when students move at the same time (e.g. beginning/end of day, lunch, breaks, playtime and recess schedules are staggered)
- Conforming with prevailing practices related to the physical distancing rule of 2 metres between staff and students as much as possible. Avoid getting close to a student's faces, where possible
- Spacing activities between students at least 2 metres or 6 feet apart as much as possible
- Encouraging more individual play and activities
- Having support staff work from home whenever possible (i.e. administrative staff)
- Check with the [local public health](#) unit regarding using on site playground equipment. If school playgrounds are utilized:
 - Limit access to play areas to small groups in a controlled manner
 - Reserve Play areas at staggered times for different groups
 - Change the recreation schedules and timed intervals between periods making it possible to minimize necessary contacts between students,
 - Monitor areas acting as bottlenecks (e.g. locker room entrance, exit to the schoolyard, stairways, etc.) to avoid creation of lineups.
- 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 and,
 - if they not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier from a person.
- Workers should be trained on the proper use, care and limitations of any required PPE.
- Limiting the total number of people at the workplace and where they are assigned to work
- Implementing a system for virtual and/or telephone consultations when and where possible
- Postponing non-essential face-to-face appointments or convert them to virtual appointments
- Staggering start/end times, breaks and lunches
- Restricting visitors and limiting workplace entry to essential personnel only
- 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.

For more information refer to Public Health, the Ministry of Education, and School Board Policies and Guidance Documents.

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 the 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](#) 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.
- Posting signage on hygiene in English and other languages in the workplace so everyone can understand how to do their part respecting hygiene practices.
- Enhancing hand hygiene for both staff and students. Encourage workers that assist students to frequently wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based (60% - 90%) hand sanitizer.
- Limiting sharing of work accessories and equipment (e.g. pens, telephone, tablets, computer mouse)
- Cleaning and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces or areas and collective equipment (e.g. door handles, light switches, toilet and faucet handles, tables and chairs, counters, desk and work surfaces, teaching and learning aids equipment, electronics, printers) twice a day and when visibly soiled.
- Allow adequate contact time according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Using Safety Data Sheets and product labels to provide additional information regarding use, handling, placement, storage and warnings associated with hand sanitizer, cleaning and disinfecting products.

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 a person is a caregiver, has a household member, or is a contact of someone who has COVID-19, s/he should follow the guidance from public health on [self-isolation](#).

People who are self-isolating should be advised to seek clinical assessment over the phone - either by calling their primary care provider's office or Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000. For additional assessment, a visit to [an assessment center](#) will help them get a COVID-19 test.

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.



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, Training and Skills Development](#);
- 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, Training and Skills Development](#)

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 workers to see and workers are instructed on them. 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 workers. 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 workers must stay home or be sent home from work. Sick workers should use the self-assessment tool for COVID-19 and follow the subsequent directions; When workers 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.

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

EDUCATION SPECIFIC RESOURCES:

Ministry of Education - <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-education>

Ontario Reopening Schools: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-reopening-schools>

PUBLIC SERVICES HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSOCIATION

Access resources and information about COVID-19 at <https://www.pshsa.ca/covid-19>

- Occupational Illness: Infectious Disease Reporting Form:
<https://www.pshsa.ca/resources/occupational-illness-infectious-disease-reporting-form>

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.