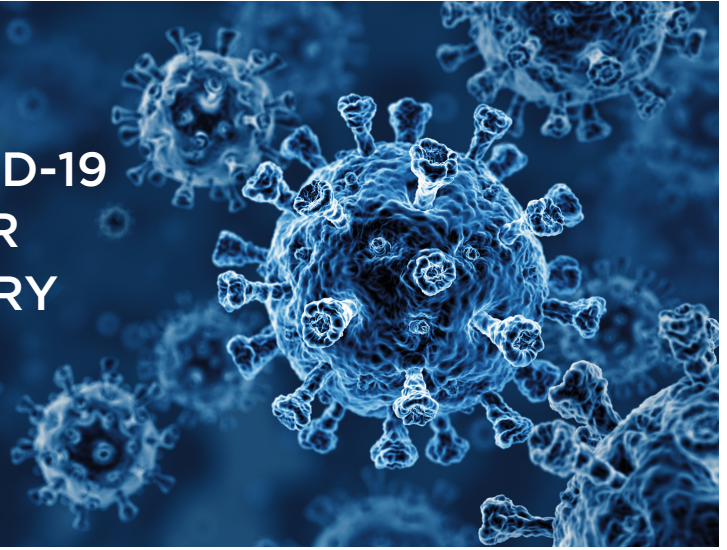




# HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19 FOR EDUCATION SECTOR EMPLOYERS – SECONDARY SCHOOLS



## OVERVIEW

During the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, we all need to do our part to keep workers, students 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](#)



## BEST PRACTICES TO KEEP YOUR WORKERS 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.

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

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.

### 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 in the workplace:

- Instruct workers to stay home if they are sick, displaying COVID-19 symptoms or have traveled outside of Canada within the last-14 days.



- 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.
- Maintain 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:
  - [Washing of hands](#) often with soap and water, before and after any breaks, at the beginning and end of a shift, and before handling food
  - If hand washing is not possible, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% - 90% alcohol content)
  - 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 and students 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.

## 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 directives from the CMOH. [Public Health Ontario](#). The plan should consider and address levels of risk associated with the workplace and job tasks within Secondary Schools including teachers, custodial staff, teaching assistants and office administration staff. This includes how the Secondary School will operate during and throughout the recovery phase following the pandemic including sanitization of the workplace, equipment and resources, how employees report illness, how to ensure physical distancing and how work will be scheduled.

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*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](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx)

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A list of activities and links to relevant resources to provide support in this area are listed 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.
- Place posters or other signage in high traffic areas:
  - Asking students and staff to stay home if they have symptoms (fever, cough or difficulty breathing).
  - Encouraging good respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and other healthy practices at the entrance to the school.
  - 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).
  - **All persons must use a face covering (non-medical mask, such as a cloth mask) in public indoor spaces (unless exempted)**
- Consider hand sanitizer stations at the entrance to the school and classrooms
- Utilize remote work for employees 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.
- Do not allow students to share equipment/supplies (i.e. writing equipment, photocopier, printer, books, tablets, and electronic devices) where possible. Ensure equipment is disinfected regularly if sharing cannot be avoided.
- 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 and post them in employee break rooms and lunch areas.
- Advise workers to practice good laundry hygiene practices with their clothing as it could potentially be a source of contamination.
- Assign staff to dedicated work areas as much as possible. Discourage students and staff from sharing sports water bottles, phones, desks, offices and other tools and equipment.
- Limit the exchange of papers permission forms for students, parent/teacher interview schedules, etc.) and consider 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 and stagger visits to eliminate people gathering in reception areas.



## 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:

- Institute measures to encourage physical distancing within the classroom in order to comply with a separation of at least 2 metres between individuals
- Consider removing some desks and chairs from individual classrooms and arranging student workspaces to ensure a 2 metre separation between desks
- Consider staggering beginning/end of day, lunch break/recreation/outdoor activities schedules to prevent large crowds
- Identify locations in the school with potential for lineups (e.g. cafeteria, washrooms, offices, etc.) and implement signage or markers to implement physical distancing
- Implement all measures to ensure physical distancing 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:
  - 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
- 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 support staff work from home whenever possible (i.e. administrative staff)
- Restricting visitors and limiting workplace entry to only essential personnel
- Suspending all group activities and gatherings, including after school and extracurricular activities
- 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 should be arranged to follow physical distancing practices. Consider staggered lunch and break times to reduce the number of workers gathering.

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

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## ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

While employers always have an obligation to maintain safe work conditions including clean workplaces; enhanced cleaning and disinfecting precautions during the COVID-19 outbreak is needed to reduce worker exposure and to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 virus.

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](#) for more details.

Employers should focus on:

- Making sure workers are aware of any hazard they may encounter in the workplace – specifically around the handling, disposal, and transport of potentially contaminated equipment or materials
- 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 majority languages in the workplace so everyone can understand how to do their part respecting hygiene practices.
- Sanitizing of commonly touched surfaces such as door handles, light switches, toilet and faucet handles, tables and chairs, counters, desk and work surfaces, electronic equipment and printers twice a day and when visibly soiled.
- Allow adequate contact time according to the manufacturers instructions
- Safety Data Sheets and product labels should be used to provide additional information regarding use, handling, placement, storage and warnings associated with hand sanitizer, cleaning and disinfecting products.

## REPORTING ILLNESS

It is recommended that you 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.

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.

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

If you have been 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, the OHSA requires employers to provide [report within four days](#), 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.

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

Consider posting these policies in areas where workers can easily find and view them, such as a break room or common areas where they most likely to come to the attention of workers.

## 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 that 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 continuously improve workplace understanding.

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*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.*

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## 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/approach-reopening-schools-2020-2021-school-year?\\_ga=2.177256997.1213921182.1592782562-1163509843.1582044912](https://www.ontario.ca/page/approach-reopening-schools-2020-2021-school-year?_ga=2.177256997.1213921182.1592782562-1163509843.1582044912)

## 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.