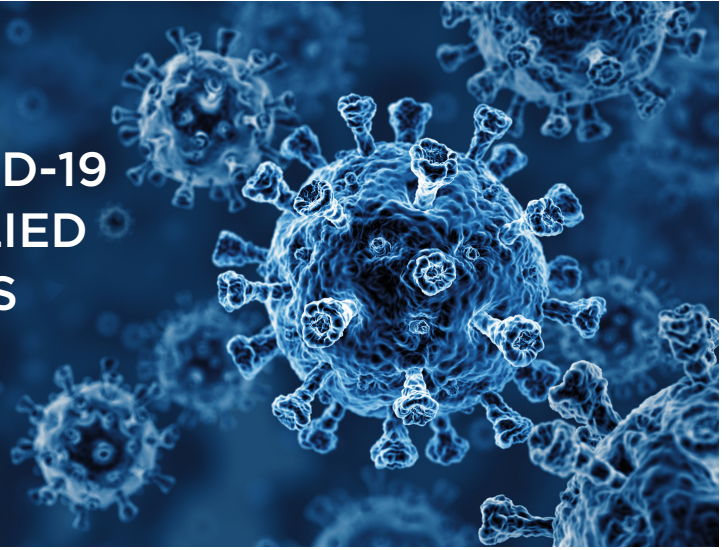




HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19 FOR EMPLOYERS OF ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



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](#)



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 and to keep allied health professional services (dentistry, optometry, physical therapy, optician services, podiatry, occupational therapy and chiropractic treatment) safely operating.

All measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 must be done in compliance with requirements under the [OHSA](#) and its regulations, the applicable [public health directives](#) issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and the [MOH's guidance for the health sector](#).

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, personal contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then the 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. (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 when hands are visibly soiled, before and after any breaks, at the beginning and end of the workday, and before preparing food or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (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 with unwashed hands.
 - Avoid high-touch areas such as door handles and keyboards, where possible, or ensure that you clean your hands after.
- Implement regular cleaning and disinfection (see Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection)
- Instruct workers to self-monitor and stay home if they are experiencing symptoms or are sick.
- Launder your clothes as soon as you get home.
- Self monitor for illness.
- Instruct staff who have symptoms or think they were exposed to COVID-19, to notify their supervisor immediately. If you or staff develop any symptoms, self-isolate, complete the covid-19 [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 the recommendations in the guidance document for [Independent Health Facilities](#) and relevant [Ministry of Health directives](#). The plan should utilize findings from the organizational risk assessment and address the levels of risk associated with the workplace and job tasks performed by allied health professionals and all other persons engaged in work activities (e.g., cleaning staff, students, contractors). This includes how the workplace will operate during and throughout the recovery phase following the pandemic including sanitization of the workplace, equipment and resources, when and how to resume deferred services, how employees report illness, how to ensure physical distancing and how work will be scheduled.

To access the most recent Ministry of Health Guidance documents for the Health Sector 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:



- 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
- All independent health facilities should limit the number of in-person visits and continue to implement a system of active screening over the phone before appointments and upon entry to the facility using the latest [case definition](#). Staff conducting active screening in person should ideally be behind a plexiglass barrier. If a 2 metre distance cannot be maintained during care or treatment, personal protective equipment as required in MOH guidance and directives must be utilized (e.g., mask, eye protection, gown and/or gloves).
- Anyone who screens positive should be advised to immediately self-isolate, call Telehealth (1-866-797-0000), their local public health unit, or their primary care provider for assessment. If possible, the client should rebook for when they have been medically cleared or outside the 14-day period. A person who screens positive upon entry to the facility should be separated from others in a room with the door closed, given a surgical/procedure mask, and instructed to perform hand hygiene. The patient can then be referred directly to the local assessment centre for testing or wait while health professionals call their local public health unit for further guidance. Note if the staff member is a practitioner with a duty to report diseases of public health significance under the [Health Protection and Promotion Act](#), they must contact the local [Public Health](#) unit.
- Initial client bookings should be limited and prioritized by urgency.
- All health professionals must practice effective hand hygiene between each client. Commonly touched surfaces (including room seats, treatment tables, door handles, and objects or machines used in therapies) should be disinfected after each use.
- Employers should utilize appropriate use of personal protective equipment for staff and clients. For more information refer to [MOH guidance](#) documents and [directives](#).
- Place posters or other signage in high traffic areas:
 - Asking clients or customers to stay home if they have symptoms (fever, cough or difficulty breathing) asked to wear a face covering (non-medical or cloth mask) to protect those around them.
 - 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).
 - Encouraging good respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and other healthy practices at the entrance to the workplace. Consider hand sanitizer stations at these locations where possible. 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](#) and instruction 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](#) processes, proper [hand washing practices](#) and other routine infection control precautions.

- Instruct sick employees to stay home, ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and the [Employment Standards Act, 2020](#) . Communicate these policies to employees.
- Based on the risk of exposure, consider implementing a process for containing and laundering work clothing. Alternatively, instruct workers to practice good laundry hygiene practices with their work clothing at home 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, ensure proper documentation, and implement 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.
- All persons must use a face covering (non-medical mask, such as a cloth mask) in public indoor spaces (unless exempted).
- Schedule visits to eliminate people gathering in reception areas and consider sectioning off chairs in waiting areas with rope to maintain 2 metre physical distancing.

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 have minimal or no symptoms (asymptomatic).

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

- Scheduling bookings to limit the number of individuals coming into the facility or waiting area. Consider asking people to wait in their vehicles and contacting them by calling or text message when appointments are ready to start if possible.
- Spacing seats in waiting areas at least 2 metres apart from others and removing non-essential items such as books, magazines, remote controls and toys.
- 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.



- The use of masks and eye protection (goggles, face shield) for full duration of shift is recommended for staff working in direct patient care area.
- Limiting the total number of staff at the workplace and where they are assigned to work
- Implementing a system for virtual and/or telephone consultations when and where possible.
- Limiting visitors accompanying patients to those who are essential (e.g., parent/guardian).
- Having staff work 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.
- Establish designated space to isolate staff who develop symptoms.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

While employers always have an obligation to maintain clean workplaces, that obligation is even more important 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 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 (60% - 90% alcohol content) if soap and water are not available.
- Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of washroom facilities.
- Availability of hands-free waste receptacles for tissue and face masks
- Posting signage on hygiene in English and the language in the workplace so everyone can understand how to do their part in respecting hygiene practices.
- Cleaning and sanitizing treatment areas and patient-contact surfaces and equipment (e.g., treatment tables) as soon as possible after use and between patients.
- Cleaning and sanitizing of high-touched surfaces or areas (e.g. door handles, light switches, toilet handles, counters, reception and waiting areas) twice a day and when visibly soiled.
- Patient/client-contact surfaces including room seats, treatment tables, and objects or machines used in therapies should be disinfected after each use.
- Allow adequate contact time according to the manufacturers instructions.
- Clothing and fabric items should be laundered and dried on the highest temperature setting possible after each use.



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 (e.g., has a fever, new cough or difficulty breathing) should return home and [self-isolate](#) immediately. If you are a caregiver, have a household member, or contact with someone who has COVID-19, you should follow the guidance from public health on [self-isolation](#).

People who are self-isolating due to covid-19 symptoms or who are concern that they may have had unprotected exposed to covid-19, 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. The employer should consult with the local public health unit to determine when the care provider can [return to work](#). HCWs providers should also report to their Employee Health/Occupational Health and Safety department prior to return to work. If the worker's illness is determined to be work-related, the employer must provide written notice to all appropriate authorities as prescribed (for more details see [Reporting Requirements](#) below).

Workers who have travelled and have been identified as critical, by all parties, to continued operations are able to return to work as long as they do not have symptoms. However, when practicing [self-isolation at work](#), the returning traveler must undergo regular screening, use appropriate PPE, and self-monitor for a period of 14 days, this includes taking their temperature twice daily to monitor for fever. If symptoms develop, the worker shall immediately self-isolate 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, 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](#)
- [Occupational Health Hazards and Illness](#)
- [Workplace exposure and illnesses](#)

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

SHARE INFORMATION WITH ALL WORKERS

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 resources developed for the sector, including this one and others produced by [Public Services Health and Safety Association](#) (PSHSA), the Ministry of Health, and Public Health Ontario and applying their recommended practices will improve workplace protection from COVID-19.

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. 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.

EMERGENCY LEAVES FOR DECLARED EMERGENCIES AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE EMERGENCIES

The MLTSD is focused on providing enhanced protections for workers. Effective March 19, 2020, the [Employment Standards Act, 2020](#), 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

The effectiveness of measures and procedures that are applied should be reviewed at regular planned intervals and adjusted as necessary to address workplace needs. Employers should also ensure that a system is in place to evaluate the extent to which legal and other requirements such as guidance and/or directives from the Ministry of Health and applicable regulatory colleges are being met.

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

OTHER RESOURCES

There are a host of additional resources available to help address the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak that can assist Allied Health workplaces. Resources include:

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CHIROPODY AND PODIATRY

- [College of Chiropractors/Podiatrists of Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Society of Chiropractors](#)
- [Ontario Podiatric Medical Association](#)

CHIROPRACTIC THERAPY

- [College of Chiropractors of Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Chiropractor Association](#)

MASSAGE THERAPY

- [College of Massage Therapists of Ontario](#)
- [Registered Massage Therapists' Association of Ontario](#)

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

- [College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists](#)

PHYSIOTHERAPY

- [College of Physiotherapists of Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Physiotherapy Association](#)



PUBLIC SERVICES HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSOCIATION RESOURCES

- Occupational Illness: Infectious Disease Reporting Form:
<https://www.pshsa.ca/resources/occupational-illness-infectious-disease-reporting-form>
- COVID-19 Resources: <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.