

# Infrastructure Health and Safety Association Guidance on best practices and workplace responsibilities for the constructor - Responding to a potential COVID-19 exposure

## 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.

Learn more about:

- [workers' rights](#)
- [employers' responsibilities](#)

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.

[Report](#) COVID-19 case(s) in the workplace to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

## Best practices

**Recognize hazards and assess 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 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](#).

As the constructor of a project, you have responsibilities for the health and safety of not only your direct employees but to all workers on the project. As such, an absence of clear and concise protocols regarding COVID-19 leaves you and your project at significant risk of infection and total shut down.

Your risk associated with COVID-19 as the constructor extends through your various employers, sub-contractors, sole-proprietors, suppliers and inspectors, whether they are directly working, delivering materials, or visiting the project.

### **Controls:**

Infection prevention and control measures prevent the spread of the virus by breaking the chain of transmission. For example, [public health guidance](#) includes staying at least 2 metres away from others which avoids close contact; washing hands removes the virus and prevents people from touching their faces with contaminated hands.

For COVID-19 in the workplace, it is recommended that employers and business owners conduct a risk assessment to determine the most appropriate controls and actions for a particular workplace/situation. Reference the [IHSA's guide](#) on the risk assessment process to help facilitate this and review [Sample 1](#) and [Sample 2](#) for examples.

Always start by considering the most effective controls first. It is best to begin by trying to

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eliminate the hazard – to remove it from the workplace altogether. Where that is not possible, use multiple engineering and administrative controls first to prevent the spread. Protective equipment (including personal protective equipment (PPE) and community protective equipment) should be relied on only where engineering and administrative controls do not sufficiently reduce the risk to workers.

In addition to the above recommendations, employers should determine whether PPE\* needs to be part of their hazard control plan. The need for PPE should be based on a risk assessment taking into account environmental conditions and also take into consideration input from the local public health unit. Although proper use of PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other control measures. Note: If physical distance and separation cannot be maintained, workers should have PPE consisting of surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (goggles or face shield).

- Workers must use PPE as required by their employer.
- Workers should be trained on the proper use, care and limitations of any required PPE.

\*NOTE: Please be reminded that most face coverings (non-medical masks) have not been tested to a known standard and do not constitute PPE. In some circumstances, face coverings may be used as an effective means of source control, but should not be viewed as an appropriate substitute for physical distancing in the workplace.

Create and communicate policies addressing the following:

- [Signs and symptoms of COVID-19](#)
- Communicating the reporting of signs and symptoms to the constructor
- Assessment of workers entering the project (implementation of worker questionnaires)
- How social/physical distancing will be accomplished
- Special work scheduling requirements
- Site sanitization and hygiene

**Here are some tips you can use to help ensure physical distancing at your worksite:**

Limit the number of people:

- Reschedule any unnecessary visits to the workplace by supply chain partners, vendors or others who don't need to be there now.
- Limit the number of workers on-site at the same time by staggering work schedules, start times, breaks, and lunches.
- Control site access, including prohibiting entry to any unauthorized person and posting signs indicating a phone number for suppliers and visitors to call for entry.
- Organize tasks so that only one trade is working in a space at a time (for example, not doing electrical work and plumbing at the same time).

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- Limit the number of people in the project trailer or lunchrooms at one time.
- Hold meetings outside or in a large space and if necessary, hold multiple meetings to limit size of groups.

Consider movement of people:

- Plan worksite mobility and transportation to take into account physical distancing, including for hoist operations.
- Set up one-way staircases and corridors wherever practical to minimize contact between workers.
- Limit the number of people who use elevators and hoists at one time through markings on the floor and direct the occupants to face the walls of the hoist or elevator rather than each other.
- Limit the number of people inside a vehicle and/or increase number of trips to allow for physical distancing; increase use of fresh air ventilation in vehicles.

Communicate expectations to workers:

- Encourage physical distancing and make sure everyone knows the capacity limits for the spaces they are using.
- Conduct work area inspections to verify workers are practicing physical distancing.
- Communicate to workers that they should notify the supervisor of any concerns about practices or procedures that may affect physical distancing.
- Use signage to reinforce your policies and control measures.

### **Manage a potential case of, or suspected exposure to, COVID-19 at the workplace**

The [guide to developing your COVID-19 workplace safety plan](#) can help you plan for what to do if there is a case of COVID-19 at your workplace or a suspected exposure to COVID-19 (see Question 4 in the guide).

If a worker calls in sick, informs you of symptoms or that they had close contact with someone with symptoms, or if anyone shows symptoms in the workplace, they should be excluded from the workplace.

Your local public health unit is responsible for identifying close contacts and determining when a workplace outbreak has occurred. You and your workers must follow any direction provided by local public health officials, including self-isolation if required. If you have questions about a case in the workplace or about public health direction, contact your local public health unit.

If a worker tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit may ask you to provide information such as where and when the worker was present and information about any other worker who may have been exposed. Consider setting up a system to track workers to be able to provide information to the public health units if needed.

You must let workers know if they may have been exposed in the workplace. You should give all workers information about the date and time of the potential exposure and where it took place. Don't give out any information that might identify the infectious person.

### **Screen for COVID-19:**

[Screening for COVID-19: guidance for employers | Ontario.ca](#)

This document provides employers with an overview of workplace screening for COVID-19 and information to help them make decisions about the use of rapid antigen screening.

Screening helps keep infected workers and others from entering the workplace thereby reducing possible workplace transmission.

- Question-based screening uses information about symptoms and exposures to identify people who may be infectious.
- Rapid antigen screening is used to help identify people who are infectious before they develop symptoms.

To further protect workers and help reduce transmission, workers who have passed screening must continue to follow all public health and workplace control measures including masking and maintaining physical distance.

### **Masks:**

Learn more about [using masks in the workplace](#) including how to select, care for and use them to protect workers from COVID-19.

### **Vaccines:**

[COVID-19 vaccines and workplace health and safety | Ontario.ca](#)

This guidance document explains how vaccines work to protect you when you are vaccinated, why COVID-19 workplace control measures need to be maintained even after workers are vaccinated, and some considerations for employers about workplace policies and supporting their workers to get vaccinated.

Workplace controls are measures that employers use to help prevent workers from being exposed to hazards like those posed by COVID-19. Vaccines are a good complement to workplace controls, but cannot replace them. They have different purposes:

- Workplace controls help prevent workers from being exposed to COVID-19.
- Vaccines help protect workers from getting sick if they are exposed.

To protect workers and help reduce the chance of COVID-19 transmission at the workplace, it is important to maintain workplace control measures even after vaccination.

### **Evaluate:**

Changes to work procedures or practices related to COVID-19 may affect the way you have routinely managed other risks in the workplace. Thus, it is recommended that you consider the various preventative measures on an ongoing basis, and review and adjust accordingly if they

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are not working as intended or have created new risks or challenges.

Review effectiveness of policies, procedures, or project protocols on a regular basis – adjust when gaps are identified or conditions change. Communicate any changes to workplace parties throughout project and ensure suppliers and inspectors are included in the communication.

Look for opportunities to improve workplace procedures and requirements – assess if there are any bottlenecks with respect to workers congregating in areas (around personnel hoists and elevators, or at break times). Continue to monitor Public Health advisories or other changes to protocols that must be implemented given new information.

Ensure all workers are clear in their responsibility to self-isolate and seek clinical assessment over the phone, either through Telehealth Ontario or by calling their primary care provider's office. If additional assessment is needed, their primary care provider or Telehealth may direct them to receive in-person care options. For Ontario residents, anyone who suspects that they have contracted COVID-19 call: 1-866-797- 0000 or TTY: 1-866-797-0007.

Keep in contact with the employer about the worker's health and ask to share any test results they have regarding confirmation of COVID-19. You may need to share the confirmation of COVID-19 with other workers or employers that were sent home due to this exposure or, if permitted by health officials, inform the other workers they can end their self-isolation.

**Self-monitor for symptoms for 10 days after exposure.**

## 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**

Develop your COVID-19 workplace safety plan: Learn how you can create a plan to help protect your workers and others from novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19).

**[Workplace Safety Plan](#)**

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

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.