

Eye Protection during the pandemic

UPDATE: As of August 4, 2021 there is no expectation within the construction, transportation or electrical utilities sectors that eye protection be *mandatory* as a control against exposure to COVID-19 when workers are within 2-metres of others. Constructors, employers, supervisors and workers must continue to take all reasonable precautions to prevent workplace exposure to the COVID-19 virus, including (but not limited to) adequate screening, physical distancing, face coverings and sanitization practices. Eye protection may reduce the risk of infection, and so the IHSA continues to consider the use of such eye protection devices, in combination with masking, as a best practice in workplaces where workers are within 2-metres of others.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA) and its member firms have been actively working to reduce COVID-19 risks on jobsites. As variants of concern (VOCs) continue to spread, it is important to consider all forms of hazard control, including the use of personal protective equipment such as eye protection.

Eyes can be a route of transmission for COVID-19 and may need to be protected from infectious droplets. Appropriate eye protection must protect the wearer from exposure to droplets not only at the front but also at the sides of eyes. Appropriate eye protection includes safety glasses with side shields, goggles, face shields, or other forms of face/eye protection.

Based on [Ministry of Health](#), and [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#) guidance, the recommendation for eye protection applies to any circumstance (e.g., indoors or outdoors) where a two-metre distance from another person cannot be maintained—regardless of whether that person is also wearing a mask. This is because in many workplaces, there is no assurance about the quality of the masks used by others, and because there is no guarantee that everyone will wear their masks correctly.

When a confirmed case of COVID-19 is identified at a workplace, the local public health unit (PHU) is responsible for determining the risk level of exposure for each person who had contact with the case. A contact who is at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 through the contact [must self-isolate \(i.e., quarantine\)](#) for 10 days.

On May 6, 2021, the Ontario Ministry of Health released an updated version of their guidance to PHUs on the [management of COVID-19 cases and contacts](#). The document notes, “In the context of VOC emergence, enhanced contact management is being adopted. This means having a lower threshold for classifying contacts as high risk of exposure and requiring self-isolation”. The guidance (Table 4) states that a workplace exposure is deemed:

High-risk (Requires self-isolation) when the contact:

- Was exposed to a confirmed case within a two-metre distance for a cumulative duration of 15 minutes or more, regardless of whether the case and/or contact were masked. The PHU has discretion to determine whether exposures of shorter duration, which are more than transient interactions, are high risk—particularly if the case or contact is not masked.

Low-risk (Does not require self-isolation) when the contact:

- Was consistently wearing appropriate PPE (i.e., surgical/procedure mask and eye protection) for the duration of the interaction with the confirmed case and without other factors that would increase the overall risk of exposure (e.g., very prolonged duration of exposure); or
- Was separated from the confirmed case by an appropriate barrier and with appropriate air ventilation.

Workers who wear PPE, including eye protection, for protection against workplace hazards besides COVID-19 must continue to use that PPE as required. Because of COVID-19, IHSA considers the use of such eye protection devices, in combination with masking, as a best practice on current jobsites. The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) inspectors are looking for the use of eye protection with appropriate masking when workers are within two metres of another person without a barrier between them. Masks when used as PPE must be surgical/procedure masks (ASTM Level 1) or N95 respirators, or provide equal or greater protection.

The following links provide additional information to help you determine which COVID-19 control measures to implement at your workplace.

Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development

- www.ontario.ca/page/develop-your-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan

Ministry of Health

- www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/contact_mngmt/management_cases_contacts.pdf

Make safety work for you. IHSA is your first step.

The Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA) is Ontario's trusted health and safety resource. Our goal is to improve the lives of Ontario workers. We provide the resources and training that control and eliminate safety hazards in work environments involving high-risk activities.

At IHSA we have always maintained a standard of excellence. We are proud of our role in helping to make Ontario one of the safest places in the world to work. Our focus is on workers and keeping our promise to provide them with the tools to *Work Safe for Life*.

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