Infrastructure Health and Safety Association Guidance on disinfecting and cleaning PPE during COVID-19

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.

The following items used by a powerline technician pose the greatest risk for contamination and should be regularly cleaned and disinfected:

- clothing
- hardhats and suspension
- protective eyewear and face shields
- harnesses
- work gloves
- face covering
- rubber gloves

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 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.

1. **Clothing**
   - If clothes are contaminated or suspected to be follow the manufacturer instructions for laundering.
   - Be aware of contaminated area on clothing if sneezed or coughed on.
   - Once removed, place contaminated clothing into a plastic bag and seal.
   - Ensure to properly wash yourself after removing the contaminated clothing.
   - Upon laundering, discard contaminated plastic bag appropriately.

2. **Hardhats and suspension**
   - Disinfect hardhat and suspension before and after each use or during use if potential for contamination has occurred.
   - Always follow manufacturer's instructions on care and use of product.
   - Remove suspension from hardhat.
   - Using a manufacturer approved cleaning agent, thoroughly clean all parts.
   - In the absence of manufacturer approved cleaning agent, best practice is to clean with soapy water. Rinse with fresh clean water to remove any residue.
   - With disinfected hands, dry with clean cloth or leave to air dry.
   - Once dry, replace suspension in hardhat with disinfected hands.
   - Inspect hardhat and suspension for damage prior to use.

3. **Protective eyewear and face shields**
    - Disinfect protective eyewear and face shields before and after each use, or during use if potential for contamination has occurred.
    - Always follow manufacturer's instructions on care and use of product.
    - Disassemble or remove any serviceable parts from eyewear or face shield.
    - Using a manufacturer approved cleaning agent, or if unavailable, use mild soapy water thoroughly clean all parts of eyewear or face shield.
    - Rinse with fresh clean water to remove any leftover cleaning agent or soap.
    - Wipe with a clean cloth or leave to air dry.
    - Once dry, reassemble with disinfected hands if required.
    - Inspect protective eyewear and face shield for damage prior to use.

4. **Harnesses:** The process for cleaning a harness is actually quite simple however, there are a few precautions to consider when doing so:

    The two most important precautions when cleaning a harness:
    - Dampen but DO NOT SOAK the harness. The excessive expansion of the fibers by soaking (and the contraction by drying) can compromise the fabric's effectiveness and shorten the harness's life.
    - NEVER put a harness in the dryer. Excessive heat and tumbling can (and will) damage the harness.

    Additionally, follow these standard cleaning precautions:
    - It is best to begin with the harness on a flat surface, leaving it open to visible inspection.
    - Using a moist sponge, wipe down the harness to remove excess dirt and dust.
    - Mix a cleaning solution using laundry detergent or dish soap. DO NOT use any cleansers that contain chlorine, bleach, or abrasives.
    - Dip your sponge into the solution and thoroughly scrub each portion of the harness until a thick lather forms.
    - Using a sponge dipped in CLEAR water, wipe down the harness to remove the suds and soap residue.
    - Let the safety harness dry in room temperature air. DO NOT use a mechanical heat dryer or expose the harness to long periods of sun-drying.
    - When cleaning multiple harnesses, store each in a separate, dry compartment. Hang them in such a way that they are not crushed, worn, or creased.
    - Never use gasoline or other 'drying solvents' to clean harnesses.

Note: If you follow these basic cleaning steps, and combine them with a thorough inspection prior to each use, you will do much to preserve your harness's life-saving function and to make the most of its working life. If you have questions or concerns about harness care and/or maintenance, contact your manufacturer.

5. **Work gloves:** Regardless of work glove materials, care needs to be taken to ensure no transfer of possible virus contaminants exist. Some steps to prevent this are:

- Wiping soil from gloves with a damp cloth and soap or submerge entire glove in soapy water.
- Allow to dry prior to re-use while utilizing a separate set of gloves.
- If no soapy water available on site spray gloves with a disinfectant spray such as Lysol or a bleach/water mixture and allow to dry.
- Ensure not to contaminate outside of gloves by sneezing or coughing into arm or mask.
- Ensure not to contaminate inside of gloves by ensuring hands disinfected prior to use.
- Ensure not to touch face with contaminated glove or suspect glove.

6. **Face covering**
   - Always follow manufacturer's instructions on care, use and cleaning of product. In the absence of manufacturer's instructions, the best practice is to clean with soapy water, rinse and dry.
   - Recognize through tailboard talk discussion, or as situation dictates, the need to wear face covering. If required, ensure face covering is AR/FR rated as per EUSR 113.
   - Don the face covering so it extends from the bottom rim of the protective eyewear onto the neck.
   - When removing the face covering, remove according to manufacturer's recommendation while protecting yourself against the possibility of contaminant present on outside of covering.
   - Do not reuse face covering until it has been washed according to manufacturer's instructions.

7. **Rubber gloves**
   - Disinfect rubber gloves before and after each use, or during if believed to be contaminated.
   - Remove leather glove cover.
   - Wash rubber glove inside and out with mild soap and water.
   - Rinse rubber glove with clean water to remove any soap or residue.
   - Allow to air dry.
   - Visually inspect and air test rubber gloves for any defects.
   - Install clean, dry leather covers and store in a clean canvas or plastic glove bag.

Note: if leather cover is believed to be contaminated, clean cover in with mild soap, water, and allow to air dry. It is recommended to have spare leather covers available for immediate use.

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

Continuously monitor the necessary tools, supplies, and equipment needed to meet your control measures. Ensure sufficient supplies are readily available, adequate, and accessible. For example:

- alcohol-based hand sanitizer, with 60-90% alcohol, approved by Public Health Ontario and Ministry of Health
- disinfectant wipes
- recommended cleaning agents
- soap and water
- cloths

- sponges
- plastic bags

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
- 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.