

Infrastructure Health and Safety Association

Guidance on lunchroom practices 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](#)

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.

Some important COVID-19 risk information includes how it is spread and what can increase the risk of a worker becoming infected. COVID-19 can be spread at the workplace in two main ways:

1. person to person – by people who are in close contact
2. by surfaces or objects – when people touch their face with contaminated hands

The level of risk in an activity will be related to the number of opportunities for transmission of the virus. This includes how close people come to each other, how many different interactions there are between people, how often people touch surfaces or objects and how long people stay in a space.

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](#).

Potential exposures on site lunchrooms: Lunchrooms are places where there is a potential for infected people to come into contact with others or contaminated surfaces.

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](#), [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 personal protective equipment (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.

- Workers must use personal protective equipment 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.

The following controls should be considered:

1. Maintain physical distancing. Physical distancing means maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) between persons. By maintaining physical distancing, you are less likely to be exposed to a respiratory virus.

2. Lunchroom area guidelines:

- Restrict eating to clearly identified and dedicated eating areas. These areas should have handwashing stations, cleaning and disinfectant materials, and adequate space to maintain minimum physical distancing.
- Post physical distancing signage to remind workers to keep their distance.
- Ensure enclosed lunchrooms are well ventilated or only made available during inclement weather, if they are not well ventilated.
- Post signage to remind workers to wash or disinfect their hands before and after eating.
- Ensure maximum limits are put on the number of people allowed in eating areas.
- Stagger coffee/lunch breaks to reduce the number of workers in the lunchroom at the same time.
- Limit access and use of shared devices like coffee machines, water fountains, microwave ovens, etc.
- Clean and disinfect tables, microwaves, and other commonly handled items between workers' lunch shifts.
- Also, ensure that the means to clean and disinfect these devices between uses is provided.
- Where there are touch points such as door handles and water coolers, etc., paper towels should be provided to allow users to avoid skin contact.
- Organize chairs and stagger seating arrangement to maintain physical distancing, or have workers take lunch and coffee breaks outside.
- Remove garbage often.
- If air circulation is a concern, install negative air units and vents outside the lunchroom.
- Separate PPE and clothing that is hung up in the lunchroom to avoid potential cross-contamination.
- Workers intending to take work clothing home should place the clothing in a plastic bag and not remove the clothing until it goes into the laundry to be washed (ideally separately).

3. Practice good hygiene. Health Canada recommends following these basic hygiene practices:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If using hand sanitizers, they must be alcohol based (with greater than 60% alcohol) to be effective.
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue and discard it, or into sleeve or shirt.

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.

For more information, visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

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:

- Cleaning materials
- Disinfectant wipes
- Plastic bags
- Paper towels

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.