

# Infrastructure Health and Safety Association

## Guidance on mental health awareness for transport drivers 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 mental health hazards for transport drivers.** Drivers normally work long hours and can be away from home for extended periods. With the additional pressure associated with being an essential service to our country's business continuity, there is the risk of additional stress and/or feelings of anxiety generated from the following:

- Pressure to deliver essential goods and services to support the economy during the pandemic.
- Long work hours in an isolated environment.
- Uncertainty of changes with COVID-19.
- Long periods of time away from family and friends.
- Maintaining an unhealthy lifestyle (such as eating non-healthy takeout options).
- Lack of physical exercise.
- Feelings of disrespect from other drivers on the road.
- Changing road and weather conditions.

### **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.

For more information, visit: [ihsa.ca/COVID-19](https://ihsa.ca/COVID-19)

- 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. While working:** The following controls can be used to manage your mental health:
  - Know the facts and ensure that you are receiving up-to-date information from reliable sources (credible news outlets, company management, etc.) and avoid rumors and gossip.
  - Reach out to your network. Physical distancing is imperative for reducing the spread of the virus, but can also cause feelings of isolation, depression, and loneliness. During rest stops or while waiting for shipments to be loaded or unloaded, use this opportunity to check in with family and friends.
  - Eat healthy and avoid the temptation to have comfort foods/snacks.
  - Practice self-care while on the road. For example, during your rest breaks, try deep breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, or meditation in your cab.
  - Use your break times to read or listen to something that has nothing to do with COVID-19.
  - Try detoxing from the digital world while on break by avoiding social media.
  - Remind yourself that you are making a difference and helping the economy and people by providing an essential service.
  - Maintain a good following distance of other vehicles and practice defensive driving methods.
  - Ensure you properly plan your trip to avoid potential weather systems, construction zones, etc.
- 2. When back at home:** take some additional measures to relax during these high-stress times before having to return to the road:
  - Get sufficient rest.
  - Spend quality time with your family and loved ones by playing games or doing puzzles.
  - Take walks for fresh air while still practicing physical distancing.
  - If you have a pet at home, have some extra cuddle time.
  - Fit in some exercise time to maintain your physical and mental health.
- 3. Personal well-being.** If you feel that you need help, remember that it is ok to ask for it. Check with your company supervisor, provincial programs, or your insurance provider to see what resources are available to you. Many companies have confidential, easy-to-access Employee Assistance Programs.
- 4. Remember to always practice good hygiene.** Health Canada recommends following basic hygiene practices:
  - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
  - If using hand sanitizers, they must be alcohol based (greater than 60% alcohol) to be

effective.

- Sneeze or cough into a tissue and discard it, or into your elbow or sleeve.

### **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.

Identify what works for you to maintain your mental health and well-being. Continue to communicate with your workplace and family and friends and discuss what may be causing you stress with the goal of making your working conditions the best they can be.

## 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

For more information, visit: [ihsa.ca/COVID-19](https://ihsa.ca/COVID-19)

- 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.