Infrastructure Health and Safety Association Guidance on school bus operations 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.

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

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.

Student/passenger/driver best practices:
The health and safety of students, drivers, passengers and employees is a top concern amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, all parties must place an increased focus on health and safety in order to keep all modes of student transportation (i.e. buses, taxis, vans etc.) operational.

All measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should be done in compliance with requirements under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and associated regulations and public health directives issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Primary hazards and risk sources may originate from close contact with other passengers or co-workers during the course of the day.

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

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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.

Physical distancing:
Physical distancing means maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) or more between persons. By maintaining physical distancing, you are less likely to be exposed to a respiratory virus. Maintaining physical distancing will assist in limiting your exposure. In order to ensure physical distancing in the vehicle, and improve awareness for drivers, employers should consider the following:
- Implement measures to ensure physical distancing and separation between people. Students or passengers from the same household may share seats.
- Consider using partitions to physically separate or impose physical distance of at least 2 metres between persons, particularly drivers and students.
  Note: If physical barriers or vehicle modifications are being considered they should be compliant with all applicable federal and provincial legislation and not interfere with or affect the safe operation of the vehicle.
- Use visual cues (e.g. floor decals or coloured tape) or signage to indicate to students where they can sit (e.g. first benches behind driver are prohibited if possible).
- Use an assigned seat plan, clearly numbered seats and daily attendance lists to facilitate contact tracing.

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- Keep lone kindergarten students closer to the front of the bus in case they require additional assistance.
- Drivers should ensure passengers sit in the back seat(s) of smaller vehicles (e.g. taxis or vans) and not in the front seat.
- Assign spaced seating according to the method and size of transportation vehicle and local school board requirements.
- Students should be advised to handle their own personal bags and belongings during pick-up and drop-off.
- Drivers and all students are expected to wear non-medical masks or face coverings, unless there is an underlying medical issue. Ensure drivers have a supply of disposable masks to ensure student compliance. Always refer to local school board and municipality requirements.
- Based on local school board requirements, limit the total number of passengers in the vehicle to ensure physical distancing.
- Have support staff work from home whenever possible (i.e. administrative staff) to limit exposure for drivers when returning vehicles.
- Limit the total number of employees/workers in the workplace to ensure physical distancing.
  - Consider implementing a system for virtual and/or telephone consultations when and where possible.
  - Non-essential in-person appointments should be postponed or converted to virtual appointments.
  - Schedule staggered start times, breaks, and lunches for workers and administrative staff.
  - Restrict visitors and limit workplace entry to only essential personnel.
  - Lunchrooms and break rooms should be arranged to follow physical distancing practices.
- 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).

Environmental cleaning and disinfection: While employers always have an obligation to maintain clean workplaces, that obligation is under sharper focus during the COVID-19 outbreak. The COVID-19 virus can survive for several days on different surfaces and objects. Frequent cleaning and disinfection is important to prevent spread of the disease. Many common household and commercial disinfectant products will help to destroy the COVID-19 virus. Some disinfectants will have an eight-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN). These products are approved for use by Health Canada. Refer to the Public Health Ontario Fact Sheet for Environmental Cleaning for more details. Employers should focus on the following:

- Ensure that easy access is provided to soap and water as a means to properly clean hands, or alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with 60-90% alcohol, approved by Public Health Ontario and Ministry of Health) if soap and water are not available.
- Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of washroom facilities for coach vehicles with washrooms.
- Post signage regarding proper hygiene in English and majority languages (as needed) in the vehicle.

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

- Ensure frequent sanitization of commonly touched workplace surfaces or areas (e.g. door handles, seats, work surfaces, equipment, etc.) twice a day and when visibly soiled.
- Establish routine cleaning and disinfection of all frequently touched surfaces by students (e.g. seats, windows) and frequently touched surfaces by drivers (e.g. steering wheel, radio controls, mirrors, seat belts, keys).
  - Student transportation vehicles should be cleaned and sanitized when students have fully disembarked and before the next passengers are permitted entry.
- Driver cockpits should be fully cleaned and disinfected at the beginning and end of each shift and during a change of drivers.
- Provide disinfectant spray or disposable disinfectant wipes and disposal trash bags to the drivers.
- Provide worker training on manufacturer's instructions for use of any cleaning and disinfectant products.
- Safety Data Sheets and product labels should be used to provide additional information regarding use, handling, placement, storage, and warnings associated with hand sanitizer, cleaning, and disinfecting products.
  Note: Cleaning and disinfectant products should be approved by Health Canada with a proper DIN number.

Vehicle controls:
- Assign drivers to dedicated transportation vehicles as much as possible. If vehicles must be shared, limit the numbers of workers sharing the vehicle and ensure cleaning and disinfection protocols are followed between shifts.
- Supply drivers with appropriate masks, face coverings, face-shields, and/or goggles as required by local school boards and municipalities.
- Advise drivers to avoid using the recirculated air option for the vehicle's ventilation during student transport; ventilate by opening windows, utilize defrost fans to direct air flow away from driver.
- Encourage good respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and other healthy practices. Consider hand sanitizer stations in the vehicles where possible.
- Drivers who may be required to assist a student or passenger involving direct contact, should sanitize or wash their hands before and after providing assistance.
- Remind parents to have students to stay home if they have symptoms (fever, cough or difficulty breathing).

If drivers are required to use general public washrooms, all surfaces should be assumed to be a potential source of contamination including the entry door, sink, and tap. Workers should be instructed to always practice good hand hygiene and hand washing procedures.

Post your policies: All employers need to post and communicate COVID-19 policies to workers. These policies should cover how the workplace will operate, including but not limited to:
- The sanitization of workplaces and vehicles
- How to ensure physical distancing
- How work will be scheduled

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

Consider posting these policies in areas where workers can easily find and view them, such as a break room or common area.

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

Track and monitor your workforce: Due to the latency period of COVID-19, it is important to track where workers have worked, where possible. If a worker tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will ask employers to provide information on where the worker worked as well as the contact information of any other worker who may have been exposed.

Monitor supplies: 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
- plastic bags
- extra masks and face coverings

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:

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

- 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.

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