Infrastructure Health and Safety Association Guidance on tool sharing (hand tools) constructor/employer procedure 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.

Each person touching a tool is a potential carrier. They may have picked up the virus from somewhere else, or may have early onset of the virus themselves and are not aware.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, “Surfaces frequently touched with hands are most likely to be contaminated. These include doorknobs, handrails, elevator buttons, light switches, cabinet handles, faucet handles, tables, countertops, and electronics. It is not yet known how long the virus can survive on different surfaces but can be killed by most cleaners and disinfectants.”

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.

Cleansing the hand tools that workers will be touching will add another layer of protection. This is particularly important when tools are shared. The site's constructor should consider taking the lead and work with contractors to encourage consistent hygiene practices. The following are options to consider for minimizing exposure from using shared hand tools.

- Communicate worksite protocols for proper hygiene expected to be practiced to ensure all contractors and workers are aware of expectations.
- Plan for enough tools to be on site (as is practical) so each worker does not need to share.
- Identify commonly shared tools in some fashion, and store these in a separate toolbox.
- Provide a label with cleansing instructions at the toolboxes where hand tools are stored, and have washing supplies available for that toolbox.
- Recommend daily cleansing of unshared tools and regular cleansing of shared tools immediately after use throughout the day, and at the start of the day before use.
- Gloves will need to be worn as required based on cleaning agents.
- Personal clothing worn at work should also be treated as a potential source of exposure. Place work clothes into a bag before taking home to launder. Ideally, wash suspected clothing separately.

Regular tool cleansing when there is no suspected case of COVID-19 can be accomplished using a soap and water solution, or a commercially available disinfecting hand towel wipe, or by a disinfecting wash. Refer to the below recommendations on how to clean and disinfect tools and equipment. Read the manufacturer's instructions to prevent possible damage to the

equipment and use any required PPE for the worker. Consider escalating the cleansing protocol in both the frequency and the disinfecting method when more people are expected to touch the tool.

When a worker has been discovered to have symptoms of COVID-19, the tools and equipment that the worker recently used should be isolated from further use, cleaned, and disinfected.

Isolate tools and equipment

- Identify tools and equipment that the worker was recently using.
- Isolate these tools and equipment for cleansing and disinfecting.
- Use PPE such as standard work gloves and coveralls to move the tools and equipment, and wash or dispose of the PPE after use.

Cleansing and disinfecting

- The employer and constructor's protocols should identify who will clean and disinfect tools and equipment.
- As more is learned about the COVID-19 virus, new disinfection guidelines may become available that can specify how long the virus can live on surfaces, and if it is appropriate to set equipment aside for a period as a disinfectant procedure.

Procedures for how to clean and disinfect tools and equipment

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. Make sure all power is off and disconnected on power tools and equipment. Read the manufacturer's directions for cleaning to avoid possible damage from liquids and chemicals.

3. Clean surface with soap and water to remove all visible debris and stains, and some of the germs.

4. Follow labeled instructions and safety data sheets on all containers of cleansing products you use.

5. Many disinfecting products are available to buy; however, they may be difficult to obtain under extreme demand. You can make your own by mixing a water and bleach solution. Check the bleach manufacturer's recommendation for mixing ratios. To disinfect, typical recommendation is to allow surface to remain wet for 5-10 minutes. Rinse thoroughly, and air dry.

6. Remove any disposable PPE and discard. Remove coveralls and place in a bag for washing in a bleach wash as per the bleach manufacturer's guidance.

7. Wash your hands after removing all PPE.

In addition to isolating and cleansing tools and equipment, inform new contractors and new workers of the protocols, and which tools and equipment are in isolation. Store enough cleaning and disinfesting solutions on site to deal with expected demand. Also, identify a number of workers that are competent to perform disinfecting protocols. If a worker unexpectedly does not show up for work, contact the worker to learn if they are self-isolating, and if so, enact your control measures to isolate an cleanse areas that may be affected.

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.

- Verify that the controls are being followed consistently and as planned. Monitor behavior and practices.
- Continuously monitor the necessary supplies and equipment needed to meet your control measures.
- Ensure sufficient supplies are readily available, adequate, and accessible.
- Review your process and identify any opportunities for improvements. Make revisions if new information becomes available that requires a change in process.
- Monitor your health for symptoms such as cough, fever, or difficulty breathing.

Self-monitor for symptoms for 14 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.