

Infrastructure Health and Safety Association

Guidance on waste collector health and safety 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](#).

Generally, management of waste that is suspected or known to contain or be contaminated with COVID-19 does not require additional precautions beyond those already used to protect workers from the hazards they encounter during their routine job tasks in solid waste, including medical waste, and wastewater management.

For household waste and recycling, use typical engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE to prevent worker exposure to the waste streams (or types of waste), including any contaminants in the materials, they manage. Typical PPE in this situation would include puncture-resistant gloves and face and eye protection.

For medical waste with potential or known COVID-19 contamination, manage like any other regulated medical waste.

On-site best practices: The health and safety of workers 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 workers safe and services 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.

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.

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. **Sanitization practices:** Employers should focus on:
 - access to soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
 - washroom facilities
 - sanitizing commonly touched surfaces or areas such as operator vehicles
 - avoid sharing of hand tools and power tools (if sharing is necessary, enable sanitization of shared equipment)
 - posting signage on hygiene in English and the majority workplace language (if different than English) so everyone can understand how to do their part
3. **Vehicle sanitization:** Throughout the course of the shift, drivers/collectors should regularly sanitize door handles and instruments commonly used in the vehicles including the steering wheel, signal indicators, gear shifter, seat belt buckle and harness, and driver and passenger seats with a soap and water.
4. **Waste collection:** Like in all other circumstances of waste collection, protect workers through the use of engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE.
 - **PPE:** Wear CSA approved safety glasses and fully coated nitrile work gloves that are cut and abrasion resistant to prevent worker exposure to the waste streams (or types of wastes), including any contaminants in the materials, they manage.
 - **Avoid contact:** Drivers and collectors should avoid contact with residents or employees from service businesses.
 - **Safe work practices:**
 - Do not reach into waste containers. If waste material cannot be safely dislodged set the container down.
 - Do not overload the hopper. Overloading the hopper could cause waste to fall out of the hopper and onto the roadway where additional clean up and handling

would be required.

- If waste material falls onto the road or a bag of waste breaks open, do not attempt to clean the waste up with your hands. Clean up and dispose of all messes/spills with a shovel. Do not handle any potentially contaminated waste with your hands.
 - When cycling the hopper, stand to the side of the truck and operate the controls as per the MLTSD's Mobile Compacting equipment safety guideline. Staying clear of the hopper area will prevent you from being caught in the compaction equipment and being hit by any projectile or potentially harmful waste debris.
 - When the on-route collection is complete, remove work gloves prior to entering the cab and then sanitize or wash your hands immediately before touching your face, before you eat, smoke, or drink.
5. **Breaks:** Recognizing that several public facilities and access to food may be limited during the COVID-19 pandemic, the recommendation is for drivers to pack and bring their own meals. Additionally, have dispatch pre-map out all public facilities that are available for access to drivers on their designated routes.
6. **Clothing:** It is recommended that uniforms are changed daily. The cleaning of work clothes minimizes the possibility of spreading the virus. If workers do not have access to a laundry service and showers at work, when they get home they should remove their boots and work clothes in the garage or far from the main living area. Bag work clothes and launder them immediately upon entering your home. Do not shake clothes. Wash clothes at a temperature of at least 60 degrees with ordinary detergent. After removing work clothes, shower before taking part in any other home activities. It is also recommended that workers sanitize their personal vehicle appropriately.
7. **Adjust on-site and production schedules:** Physical distancing may result in lower staffing on assigned shifts. In order to keep services operating, employers will need to adjust production schedules as the impacts of physical distancing become clear. All workplace parties will need to collaborate to ensure there is a clear understanding of how production will be impacted and discuss recommendations and solutions.

Schedulers should also consider:

- limiting number of workers by staggering work schedules
 - sanitation of sites, workspaces, and equipment
 - site planning to facilitate appropriate physical distancing (two metres) between workers during any particular shift
8. **Track and monitor your workforce:** Due to the time it could take for symptoms of COVID-19 to develop, it is important to track where employees have worked. If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will ask employers to provide information on where the employee worked as well as the contact information of any other employee who may have been exposed. Employers will track information and Public Health Units will respond.

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:

- Standard PPE for waste collectors (i.e. Face protection, gloves)
- Hand sanitizer
- Disinfectant wipes

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

- 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.