Guidance for Employers on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace

As health authorities around the world take action to contain the spread of COVID-19, employers must also play a role in stopping the spread of this disease. This guidance document describes the requirements of employers as per provincial regulations and local orders and directives. It also provides simple strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace to keep everyone safe. These strategies can and should be adapted to meet the unique needs of every workplace. Additional guidance for various sectors are found in the Other Resources section at the end of this document.

The aim and purpose of this document is to assist individuals and businesses with information related to the Ontario Government’s reopening framework as well as Toronto Public Health requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is important to know that breaches of some of these directions will constitute offences under provincial regulations or other public health legal requirements. While we aim to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional.

On January 4, 2021, Toronto’s Medical Officer of Health issued a Letter of Instruction to all employers in the City of Toronto permitted to be open under the Reopening Ontario Act. Employers permitted to be open are required to take the additional measures set out in this Letter to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

New measures businesses and workplaces should be aware of include:

- All workplaces are required to prepare and make available a safety plan. See below for details.
- Operators must ensure that any person who performs work for the business or organization conducts their work remotely, unless their work requires them to be on-site at the workplace.
- Businesses must ensure that the number of persons occupying any room that is open to the public does not exceed the capacity, as determined by provincial regulations, of the particular room.
- See O. Reg. 82/20 Schedule 7 and 8 for a list of businesses that may open at this time and applicable conditions.
**General Guidance**

- Visit our website at [toronto.ca/COVID19](http://toronto.ca/COVID19) often, as information changes frequently.
- Develop strategies to minimize exposure to COVID-19.
- Provide staff training on the required public health measures.
- Limit number of staff, clients and customers in indoor settings to allow for physical distancing.
- Schedule frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-touch items, surfaces, and washrooms.
- Inform staff, clients and customers about actions you are taking to keep everyone safe.
- Review the [Guidance for Employers on Managing COVID-19 in the Workplace](http://guidance) to plan and implement protocols to keep staff and customers safe.

**Roles and Responsibilities of the Employer and Employee during COVID-19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer Responsibilities</th>
<th>Employee Responsibilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Keep workers and workplaces safe and free of hazards.</td>
<td>• Refuse unsafe work and promptly report the circumstances to your employer or supervisor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Read the <a href="http://guide">guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act</a> to understand all of your health and safety rights and responsibilities.</td>
<td>• Understand and follow your employers' workplace health and safety directions (e.g., use or wear the personal protective equipment that your employer requires).</td>
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<td>• Understand COVID-19 risks.</td>
<td>• Follow direction from public health officials.</td>
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<td>• Control COVID-19 risks in the workplace.</td>
<td>Report any circumstance in the workplace that is likely to be hazardous to the health or safety of others in the workplace. This includes reporting one's own potential exposure to COVID-19 that caused or is likely to cause illness to another person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop a <a href="http://plan">COVID-19 workplace safety plan</a>.</td>
<td>• Comply with any advice, recommendations and instructions by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and City of Toronto bylaws relevant to your organization.</td>
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**Safety Plan**

- All businesses and workplaces are required to prepare and make available a safety plan. This safety plan must:
  - Describe measures/procedures that have been or will be implemented in the business, place, facility or establishment to reduce spread of COVID-19.
  - Include measures for screening, physical distancing, masks, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, and the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE).
  - Be in writing and made available to any person for review on request.
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- Be posted in a visible place to come to the attention of those working or attending the location.
- Assign a lead person who will be responsible for developing and implementing the safety plan.

Use the [COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist](#) to develop your safety plan.

### Health Screening for Staff and Customers

The person responsible for the business or organization must comply with any advice, recommendations, and instructions issued by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health on screening [employees and patrons](#) (O Reg 82/20).

**NOTE changes to screening tool:** Individuals living with someone who has any new COVID-19 symptoms and/or is waiting for COVID-19 test results after experiencing symptoms must stay home until COVID-19 is ruled out.

- Staff must complete a health screening questionnaire before each shift. The questions can be completed on paper, online or by asking staff directly.
  - Online screening can be completed prior to entering the workplace using the [provincial screening tool for workers and employees](#).
  - In-person screening can be completed on paper using the TPH [staff screening questionnaire](#) (also available in other languages).
- Screening should occur before or when a worker enters the workplace at the beginning of their day or shift, or when an essential visitor arrives.
- Designate an area outside, near the main entrance, as a screening station for in-person screening.
  - The area should be clearly identifiable as the screening station.
  - Post [signs](#) in visible locations clearly explaining the screening process and conditions for entry.
  - The area must allow for a minimum of two metres/six feet distance between staff conducting screening and the individual being screened. Alternatively, a protective barrier (e.g. plexiglass) may be equipped around the screening station.
  - If physical distancing or a barrier is not possible, staff conducting the screening should wear appropriate personal protective equipment (e.g. surgical mask, face shield).
  - Use visual markers/cues (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) as a guide for physical distancing for staff, person being screened and persons waiting to be screened.
- Temperature checks are not required, nor recommended.
If staff become sick with COVID-19 symptoms while at work, they should go home right away and self-isolate. Instruct them to call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000, their health care provider or an Assessment Centre to get tested.

Ask all clients and customers to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to entry to your workplace or business.
- Display posters at entrances informing people that they must not enter if they have symptoms.
- Clients and customers can also be asked to complete the provincial screening tool for customers online prior to entering a place of business.

**Staff Attendance and Operations**

- Employers must enable and support workers to work remotely wherever possible, and accommodate household needs related to virtual education and dependent care.
  - Cancel or hold virtually all in-person activities that are discretionary.
  - Host virtual meetings.
- Keep a list of the names and contact information of all staff, workers and essential visitors who enter the workplace, including for in-person meetings or events. This will support contact tracing.
  - This information must be kept for 30 days and then shredded.
  - This information must be provided to Toronto Public Health upon request.

**Note:** Some businesses which have patrons entering for limited exceptions are also required to maintain contact information for all patrons/visitors who enter their facility, including:
  - Community centres and multi-purpose facilities
  - Concert venue, theatre, cinema (for performers)
  - Indoor and outdoor sports and recreational fitness facilities
  - Meeting and event spaces
  - Public libraries

- Remind staff about the importance of staying home when they are sick and reporting illness to their supervisor/manager.
- Make plans to operate with different levels of employee absenteeism due to illness, ill-dependants, or for child care during school closures.
- Plan business functions, jobs, roles and critical elements within your business that are essential or critical when public health restrictions are in place, or if staffing levels are reduced.
- Non-essential work travel should be avoided.
- Travellers entering Canada must self-isolate for 14 days after they return from travel anywhere outside of Canada, including the United States.
Healthy individuals that cross the border and are performing an essential job or function are exempt from self-isolation under the Quarantine Act, but they must self-monitor for symptoms. For more information on travel restrictions, visit the Government of Canada website.

Prepare for staff reporting sick

- Have a flexible sick policy so staff do not come to work when they are ill.
  - Ensure that all employees are aware of the income replacement and workplace-related benefits they are entitled to if they have to isolate due to symptoms of COVID-19, being tested for COVID-19, or being a close contact of someone with COVID-19. They may also be eligible for Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB).
- Use the staff screening questionnaire (p. 2) to determine when it is safe to return to work.
- Toronto Public Health does not recommend that employers require clearance testing or doctor's notes for return to work.
- Review the Guidance for Employers on Managing COVID-19 in the Workplace to know what to do if an employee tests positive for COVID-19.

Promote Physical Distancing

- Employers are required to ensure that physical distancing of at least two metres/six feet takes place by staff throughout the workplace and during eating and rest periods (e.g., lunchrooms, change rooms, washrooms).
  - Masks and physical barriers provide added layers of protection, but are not substitutes for physical distancing.
- Limit the number of staff and contractors present at the workplace at any given time.
  - Enable flexible work hours and schedules.
  - Stagger work shifts and breaks to reduce gathering in common areas (e.g. entrance, lunch room, locker room).
  - Assign staff to groups that are physically separated in different areas or have rotating schedules, if possible, so that groups do not mix at any time.
  - Assign workstations and equipment to a single user if possible, or limit the number of users.
  - Post signs with the number of people allowed into the premise and within each room/space.
- Minimize instances of more than one individual in a vehicle for driving associated with work. If unavoidable, ensure face coverings are worn in the vehicle (preferably medical masks), and drive with the windows open.
- Encourage staff who carpool to limit the number of passengers in their car, not to drive or ride if they are sick, and to follow public health guidance for taxis and ride-share vehicles.
Limit capacity

- Businesses and facilities open to the public must limit the number of persons in the facility so that:
  - Members of the public are able to maintain at least two metres/six feet physical distancing from people they don't live with, and
  - The total number of members of the public does not exceed 50% capacity.
- 50% capacity can be calculated by taking the total square metres of floor space accessible to the public (excluding shelves and fixed structures) and dividing that number by 8.
- Some retail businesses are required to limit capacity to 25%. See sector specific guidance for details.

Modify services and space to promote physical distancing

- Modify services to reduce the number of customers present at the same time:
  - Provide services online or by phone whenever possible.
  - Offer mail, product or curb-side delivery, and follow contact-less delivery practices.
- Modify and manage the physical space to promote physical distancing:
  - Install one-way walkways to reduce close physical interactions.
  - Remove surplus furniture and supplies from rooms and walkways to allow ease of movement while maintaining physical distancing.
  - Move or tape off furniture in lunch rooms, meeting rooms, etc. so staff or customers cannot sit within two metres/six feet from each other.
  - Close off alternate work stations and/or customer service windows/check-outs where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
  - Use visual markers (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) to remind people where to stand to keep two metre/six foot distance from others (e.g. on a production line).
  - Implement physical barriers (e.g. plexiglass), when physical distancing is not possible.
    - The height of the barrier should take into account the tallest user and should consider the user's breathing zone, which generally extends 30 centimeters or 12 inches around (and above) the mid-point of a person’s face.
    - Physical distancing is always preferable to the use of barriers.
  - Use outdoor space whenever possible.
- Manage employee and customer lines. Operators are required to ensure that customers maintain two metres/six feet physical distance from others and wear a mask or face covering while in line.
- Post physical distancing signs at all entrances, employee rooms, elevators, and public areas (e.g. cashiers, service counters).
Encourage Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

- Post Wash your Hands, Cover your Cough, Protect Yourself signs in high traffic areas.
- Ensure hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) and hand-washing facilities are provided in work and rest areas throughout the facility.
- Ensure an adequate supply of liquid soap, paper towel, hand sanitizer, tissues, and waste receptacles throughout the workplace, and in washrooms.
- Glove use is not a substitute for proper hand hygiene.
  - If gloves are used, it is important to change them every hour, or more often, as necessary (e.g. when changing tasks).
  - Hands should be washed and/or sanitized between changes.
  - When gloves are removed, new gloves must be used each time.
- Educate staff on proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

Enhance Cleaning and Disinfection

- Implement rigorous and frequent environmental cleaning and disinfection in all high-touch areas and areas that are accessible to the public, including washrooms, check-out counters, concession stands, and other high-touch surfaces, such as doorknobs, elevator buttons, etc.
- Cleaners break down grease and other organic material from surfaces. Most regular household cleaning products are effective at reducing the amount of germs on surfaces.
- Disinfectants kill germs that remain on surfaces even after cleaning.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces at least twice a day and more frequently as needed. High-touch surfaces include items such as door handles, counters, cabinet doors, elevator buttons, light switches, faucets, toilet handles, hand rails, touch screen surfaces, and keypads.
- Equipment and tools that must be shared should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, including between users (e.g. cashier's stations, machinery). If staff are separated into assigned groups, clean and disinfect shared spaces between rotating groups.
- Review Public Health Ontario’s Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings fact sheet.
- Look for cleaning and disinfectant products with an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN) to confirm it is approved for use in Canada.
  - Refer to Health Canada’s list of hard surface disinfectants for use against COVID-19.
  - Check the expiry dates of products and always follow manufacturer’s instructions.
- Cleaning/disinfection wipes should only be used for surfaces, and according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Ensure adequate ventilation when using products (e.g. open windows, doors, or use fans).
• Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning the setting.
• Educate staff on [how to maintain a clean workplace during COVID-19](https://example.com), including:
  o Proper use of cleaning agents and disinfectants, including required disinfectant contact times (amount of time that the product needs to remain wet on a surface to work effectively).
  o Safety precautions and requirements for use of mask and gloves.

### Masks/Face Coverings for Staff, Clients and Customers

The use of non-medical masks or face coverings is required in all indoor public spaces, under a new City of Toronto bylaw and O. Reg. 82/20.

• The City bylaw requires that businesses with indoor spaces that are open to the public must develop a policy on the wearing of masks. Use the [Mask By-law Checklist and Sample Policy](https://example.com).
• Operators must ensure that any person in the indoor area of the business or organization, or in a vehicle that is operating as part of the business or organization, wears a mask or face covering in a manner that covers their nose, mouth and while they are in the indoor area.
• Mask/face coverings do not need to be worn by employees in indoor areas if:
  o the area is not accessible to members of the public, and
  o employees are able to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres/six feet from every other person.
• Not all clients or customers are able to tolerate a mask and may be [exempted](https://example.com). For example, masks should not be used by children under age two, and anyone who has trouble breathing.
• Other [exemptions](https://example.com) include temporary removal of a mask to receive certain services (e.g. during a dental exam) and for emergency or medical purposes.
• Consider alternative ways to provide services to those who are unable to wear a mask (e.g. provide services at the end of the day when other customers are not present, use barriers such as plexiglass, and maintain physical distance when possible).
• If possible, provide disposable masks for clients or customers who have not brought their own.
• Train staff on these new requirements, including who is exempt and the [proper use of a cloth mask or face covering](https://example.com).

### Personal Protective Equipment

• Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) that covers the eyes, nose and mouth must be worn if, while providing service in an indoor area, the person:
  o is required to come within two metres of another person who is not wearing a mask or face covering; and
is not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier from a person described above.

- PPE may be required for other roles within the workplace (e.g. first aid attendant). The employer must determine when and what PPE is required, and ensure that it is worn by workers.
- If physical distance and separation via a physical barrier cannot be maintained, workers should have PPE consisting of surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (goggles or face shield).
- Train employees on how to don and doff PPE safely.

Maintain Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Systems

- Conduct or have the property owner or landlord conduct a regular review of HVAC systems to ensure it operating properly.
- Consider consulting an HVAC specialist to determine if the HVAC system is suitable for the type of setting, type of activity, number of occupants, and the length of time the space is occupied.
- Increase the introduction and circulation of outdoor air by maximizing the outdoor air ratio of the HVAC system settings, or by opening windows and doors, where possible. Avoid recirculating air.
- Where provided, use the highest efficiency filters that are compatible with the HVAC system.
- Increase air-exchanges if possible.
- Keep areas near HVAC inlets and outlets clear.
  - Seating should be arranged away from areas with high airflow (i.e. not in front of air vents).
- Facilities without HVAC systems should increase ventilation by opening windows and doors. However, do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to staff and customers.
- Rooms where ceiling fans are used should have an upward airflow rotation.
- If portable fans are used, limit the blowing of air across people and surfaces by positioning them to provide an upward movement of air.
- Portable air purifiers/cleaners equipped with a HEPA filter could potentially reduce exposure to COVID-19. If used, follow the manufacturer’s directions (and possibly the advice of a service professional) to decide where best to place the device. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions on maintenance. Portable air cleaners are not a substitute for proper ventilation and other preventive measures.
- For more information, review the COVID-19: Transmission, Aerosols and Ventilation fact sheet.

Communication

- Inform staff and customers about the measures being taken to protect them against COVID-19.
- Encourage staff and customers to download the COVID Alert app so they can be notified directly if they have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.
Display information throughout your setting to promote messages about how to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, including COVID-19: Spread the Word and COVID-19 Fact Sheet.

Other Resources
Toronto Public Health: COVID-19: Reopening Guidelines for Businesses & Community Organizations
Toronto Public Health: COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist
Toronto Public Health: Workplace Checklists
Province of Ontario: Guidance to Prevent COVID-19 in the Workplace (for sector-specific guidance)
Province of Ontario: COVID-19 Support for Businesses
Government of Canada: Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety: COVID-19 Tip Sheets

More information
For more information visit toronto.ca/COVID19 to stay up to date.