

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.

General Guidance

- Visit our website at 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](#) to plan and implement protocols to keep staff and customers safe.

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

Employer Responsibilities	Employee Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep workers and workplaces safe and free of hazards. • Read the guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act to understand all of your health and safety rights and responsibilities. • Understand COVID-19 risks. • Control COVID-19 risks in the workplace. • Develop a COVID-19 workplace safety plan. • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refuse unsafe work and promptly report the circumstances to your employer or supervisor. • Understand and follow your employers' workplace health and safety directions (e.g., use or wear the personal protective equipment that your employer requires). • Follow direction from public health officials. • 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.

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 for COVID-19 ([O Reg 263/20](#)).

- Staff must complete a [health screening questionnaire](#) before each shift. The questions can be completed on paper, online or by asking staff directly.
- 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.
- 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.

Staff Attendance and Operations

- Assign a compliance officer to ensure implementation of occupational health and safety and infection prevention and control measures.
- 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 are also required to maintain contact information for all patrons who enter their facility, including:

- Meeting and event spaces
- Food and drink establishments
- Concert venues, theatres and cinemas
- Indoor and outdoor sports and recreational fitness facilities
- Casinos, bingo halls and gaming establishments.
- Remind staff about the importance of staying home when they are sick and reporting illness to their supervisor/manager.
- Have a flexible sick policy so staff do not come to work when they are ill.
 - Inform employees of their workplace benefits. They may also be eligible for [Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit \(CRSB\)](#).
- Use the [COVID-19 Decision Guide for Workplaces](#) 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.
- Make plans to operate with different levels of employee absenteeism due to illness, ill-dependants, or for child care during school closures.

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- 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](#).
- 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

- Staff should keep at least two metres/six feet from other staff and clients as much as possible.
 - 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.
 - Cancel or hold virtually all in-person activities that are discretionary.
 - Offer and promote teleworking options wherever possible.
 - Host virtual meetings.
 - 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.
- 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](#).
- 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:
 - 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).

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- In spaces where physical distancing is not possible, and close contact between staff and clients is unavoidable, install [protective barriers](#) (e.g. plexiglass). 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.
- Use outdoor space whenever possible.
- Manage employee and customer lines. Use public announcement systems or have employees remind people to stay at least two metres/six feet apart from others.
- 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.
- Provide hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) by entrances and 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

- Schedule enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection practices.
- 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.

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- 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](#), including:
 - 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).
 - 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](#). This bylaw requires that businesses with indoor spaces that are open to the public must develop a policy and protocols on the wearing of masks.
 - Refer to the [guidance on mask and face covering bylaw](#) for a sample policy your organization can adapt.
 - If possible, provide disposable masks for clients or customers who have not brought their own.
 - Not all clients or customers are able to tolerate a mask and may be [exempted](#). For example, masks should not be used by children under age two, and anyone who has trouble breathing.
 - 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).
- A new [provincial requirement](#) ([O. Reg. 263/20](#)) requires that the person responsible for a business or organization ensures 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 mouth, nose and chin during any period when they are in the indoor area.
 - Masks/face coverings must be worn by employees in indoor areas, whether or not the workplace is open to the public.
 - Mask/face coverings do not need to be worn in indoor areas not accessible to members of the public where employees are able to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres/six feet from every other person.
 - There are additional [exemptions](#) when face masks are not required. For example, temporary removal may be permitted to receive certain services (e.g. during a dental exam) and for emergency or medical purposes.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment that covers the eyes, nose and mouth must be worn if, while providing service in an indoor area, the person:
 - is required to come within two metres of another person who is not wearing a mask or face covering; and

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- is not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier from a person described above.
- If direct client contact is essential and physical distancing cannot be maintained, staff should wear a surgical/medical mask and eye protection (e.g. face shield, goggles).
- Train staff on these new requirements, including who is exempt and the [proper use of a cloth mask or face covering](#).

Maintain Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Systems

- 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.
- Ensure the HVAC system(s) are properly maintained.
- 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.
- There is no evidence for the use of portable air purifiers to prevent the spread of 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.
- 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](#)Province of Ontario: [Develop Your COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#)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: [COVID-19: Your Rights and Responsibilities as an Employee](#)

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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](#)

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