

COVID-19 Guidance for Workplaces / Businesses and Employers

The Government of Ontario has ordered the mandatory closure of all non-essential workplaces, effective March 24, 2020 at 11:59 p.m., as a temporary measure. The following interim guidance are recommendations to help reduce the risk of workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in [workplaces that are authorized by the Government of Ontario to remain open](#). These recommendations do not apply to healthcare settings.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infection caused by a new type of coronavirus. COVID-19 can present as an acute respiratory illness in humans. More information on COVID-19 can be found in the [Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Fact Sheet](#).

Preventing respiratory infections in the workplace

Recommendations to employers:

- **Practice physical distancing when in the workplace and reduce opportunities for any crowding:**
 - Allow employees to telecommute if the job allows
 - Create staggered work hours.
 - Make work schedules flexible.

- **Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:**
 - Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not go to work. Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick. Information on self-assessments for COVID-19 and accessing testing is available on our website. For people not tested who may have COVID-19, the advice is to self-isolate for 14 days in general. Employees should speak with occupational health and safety as the criteria for return to work for COVID-19 is unique and depending on the setting.
 - Employers should be flexible with requiring healthcare provider's notes for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness. Healthcare provider notes to validate employee illness or to return to work can put unnecessary strain on healthcare provider offices and medical facilities during this busy time.
 - Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. During this time, employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members.

- **Separate sick employees:**
 - Employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work and employees who become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and sent home immediately.

- **Emphasize respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees:**
 - Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), [hand washing](#) and [hand sanitizing](#) at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
 - Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
 - Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand rub that contains at least 70% alcohol concentration, or to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds. Washing hands with soap and water is preferred if hands are visibly dirty.
 - Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rub in the workplace. Ensure adequate supplies are maintained.

- **Perform routine environmental cleaning and disinfection:**
 - Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19.
 - Frequently touched surfaces are most likely to be contaminated.
 - Use only disinfectants that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms it is approved for use in Canada.
 - Check the expiry date of products you use and always follow manufacturer's instructions.
 - In addition to routine cleaning, surfaces that have frequent contact with hands should be cleaned and disinfected twice per day and when visibly dirty.
 - Examples include doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches, toilet handles, counters, hand rails, touch screen surfaces and keypads.
 - In addition to routine cleaning, check with your organization for any specific protocols for cleaning related to COVID-19.

- **Travel related advice:**
 - At this current time, the Government of Canada recommends all Canadians avoid all non-essential travel. Check the Government of Canada's [travel advisories](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations.
 - For all travellers entering Canada, you will be required to do the following:
 - [self-isolate](#) for 14 days after your return from travel outside of Canada. Healthy individuals that cross the border and are deemed essential workers are exempt from self-isolation but must self-monitor for symptoms.

Additional workplace considerations in response to current cases of COVID-19

- Confirmed and suspect cases of COVID-19 are reported by health care providers and laboratories to public health. Workplaces other than health care settings do not need to report to public health.
- Public health performs a risk assessment for all exposures including those that may occur in a workplace.
- Public health will provide advice regarding any other measures that the workplace or staff may need to take to reduce the risk of transmission.

- Unless advised by Toronto Public Health through the above assessment, there are no restrictions or special measures required for contacts of suspected cases of COVID-19 in the setting. There is no need to close the setting or send people home.
- Public health will advise if any special cleaning processes are recommended. Regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces and hands reduces the risk of infection.

Reducing the impact of community spread of COVID-19

Employers should be able to respond in a flexible way to varying levels of severity and be prepared to change their business response plans as needed. Keep up to date with information on the [Toronto Public Health website](https://www.toronto.ca/health).

All employers need to consider how best to decrease the spread of acute respiratory illness and lower the impact of COVID-19 in their workplace in order to mitigate the impact of community spread. Employers should identify and communicate their plan, which may include:

- Complying with Provincial Emergency Orders if it applies to your business
- Reducing the spread among staff
- Protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications
- Maintaining business operations
- Minimizing negative effects on other entities in their supply chains by:
 - Continuing business functions, jobs or roles, and critical elements within your supply chains (e.g., raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products, and logistics) that have been identified to be essential or critical to maintain your overall business operations.

Employers should implement procedures for altering business operations (e.g., training staff on new public health recommendations, changing or closing operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees.

- Minimize the opportunity for exposure between employees and also between employees and the public by following [physical distancing](#) practices
- Establish a process to communicate information to employees and business partners on the latest COVID-19 information. Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors, and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- Determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children if dismissed from school. Businesses and other employers should prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies for these employees.

More information

For more information, visit our website at www.toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.

References

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