

Guidance for Employers on Managing 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 provides simple strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace to keep everyone safe. The 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.
- Review the [Guidance for Employers on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace](#) to plan and implement protocols to keep staff and customers safe, including:
 - Health screening for staff and customers
 - Staff attendance and operations
 - Promoting physical distancing
 - Encouraging hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
 - Enhancing cleaning and disinfection
 - Masks/face coverings for staff, clients and customers
 - Maintain heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems
 - Communication

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.

Support the Employee with COVID-19

- Ensure you have policies that support employees who need to be absent from work due to illness or being a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19.
 - Inform employees of their workplace benefits. They may also be eligible for [Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit \(CRSB\)](#).
- Employees are responsible to report COVID-19 illness to their employer if it is likely to cause illness to another person in the workplace.
- If an employee discloses to you that they have been diagnosed with COVID-19, or have been exposed to a person with COVID-19, confirm that they are self-isolating.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that may have been touched by an employee with COVID-19 as soon as possible.
- Use the [COVID-19 Decision Guide for Workplaces](#) to determine when it is safe to return to work.
- Employees should not return to work until after the required self-isolation period:
 - Individuals with COVID-19 must self-isolate for 10 days from the day their symptoms started. They should no longer have a fever, and their symptoms should be improving for at least 24 hours. If they did not have any symptoms of COVID-19 at or around the time of testing, they must self-isolate for 10 days after the test was performed.
 - Individuals with severe illness may require longer self-isolation periods, as directed by Toronto Public Health.
 - Individuals who have been identified as close contacts must self-isolate for 14 days after their last exposure to the person with COVID-19.
- Toronto Public Health does not recommend that employers require clearance testing or doctor's notes for return to work.

Contact Tracing in the Workplace

- Toronto Public Health interviews each person with COVID-19 as soon as possible to ensure they are self-isolating, and helps them to identify people who may have been exposed while they were contagious, including in the workplace.
 - A person with COVID-19 is contagious from 48 hours before symptoms start until the end of their self-isolation period, usually 10 days after symptoms began.
 - If someone tested positive for COVID-19 but did not have symptoms, they are considered to be contagious from 48 hours before the test to 10 days after the test.
 - Example: If an employee develops a fever and cough on September 4 and tests positive for COVID-19, they would be considered contagious between September 2 and September 14. Anyone the employee interacted with during this time would be considered exposed.
- Toronto Public Health will help individuals with COVID-19 to identify who is a close contact and provide a letter for them to give to the close contact instructing them to self-isolate for 14 days from the last time they interacted with the person who tested positive, and recommend that they also get tested.

Revised November 16, 2020

- **Close contacts (or higher risk contacts)** include staff, visitors or patrons who were within two metres/six feet of the person with COVID-19, with or without a mask, for approximately 15 minutes or more, or who had direct contact with that individual while they coughed or sneezed.
 - Examples: Having lunch or a drink with co-worker at the same table sitting less than two metres/six feet apart; staff that are unable to keep distance due to the job such as working on an assembly line; or sharing a drink from the same glass or bottle.
 - Close contacts should [self-isolate](#) for 14 days from the last day that they were exposed to the person with COVID-19 while they were contagious.
- **Lower risk contacts** include staff, visitors, or patrons who had contact with the person with COVID-19 for any length of time while physical distancing (keeping two meters/six feet apart). It also includes occasional interactions (lasting a few minutes) where physical distancing may or may not have been maintained.
 - Examples: Co-workers in a common work area separated by more than two metres/six feet; quickly walking by the case in a hallway; or being briefly in the same room together.
 - Lower risk contacts should [self-monitor](#) for symptoms for 14 days from the last day that they were exposed to the person with COVID-19 while they were contagious.
- To support contact tracing, maintain attendance records of all staff and clients (i.e. name, date, time, email address or phone number). As per [O. Reg 263/20](#), patron logs are required for:
 - Meeting and event spaces,
 - Concert venues, theatres and cinemas,
 - Indoor and outdoor sports and recreational fitness facilities,
 - Casinos, bingo halls and gaming establishments, and
 - Food and drink establishments ([also per By-law 665-2020](#)).
- Employers may be notified by an employee or patron who may have been contagious while at the workplace.
 - The employer should work with an employee with COVID-19 to identify if others may have been exposed at the workplace while the person was contagious.
 - The employer can notify employees who were considered to have been close contacts to [self-isolate](#), and lower risk contacts to [self-monitor](#), for 14 days from their last exposure to the case, while maintaining confidentiality of all affected employees.
 - This approach can also be used if an employer is informed that a patron/client attended the establishment while contagious, and had close contact with their employees.
 - If a person with COVID-19 discloses illness to the employer, but others at the workplace have **not** been exposed (e.g. staff was not present while contagious), then further contact tracing would not be needed at the workplace.
- Employers may be notified by Toronto Public Health that a person with COVID-19 may have been present at the workplace while contagious.
 - Consent is obtained from the employee before Toronto Public Health discloses personal health information to the employer.

Revised November 16, 2020

- Upon request, be prepared to provide a list of the names and contact information of staff and, if applicable, clients or patrons, who may have been exposed. Toronto Public Health can use this information to notify and provide instructions for close contacts to [self-isolate](#) or self-monitor for [COVID-19 symptoms](#).
- Personal information collected for COVID-19 contract tracing can only be used for this purpose, unless an individual provides their consent. Records should only be kept for 30 days, and then shredded.
- Ensure you maintain privacy and confidentiality of employees' and patrons' personal health information at all times. If necessary, use non-descript language if notifying others that a person who was in the workplace, floor, or area was infected or exposed to the COVID-19 virus.
- Public notification is generally not required unless persons who may have been exposed while at the workplace cannot be identified or contacted in a timely manner.

COVID-19 Outbreaks in the Workplace

- A workplace outbreak can be defined as two or more confirmed COVID-19 cases in the workplace that are linked (e.g. same work area, same shift) within a 14-day period where both cases could have reasonably become infected while at the workplace.
 - Examples of having "reasonably" become infected while at the workplace include a known exposure to a staff, visitor or patron who was COVID-19 positive while in the workplace, or no obvious source of infection outside of the workplace.
- Toronto Public Health will conduct an investigation of workplace outbreaks in some circumstances.
- A public health investigation can include any of the following:
 - Interview with the employer to assess existing prevention measures and possible sources of transmission in the workplace.
 - This may be done by telephone and/or by electronic survey.
 - Request for information to help identify additional cases and tracing contacts.
 - This may include staff contact information, staff schedules, and patron logs.
 - You may be provided with an electronic link or survey to share information securely with the investigator.
 - Guidance on additional required prevention measures, including workplace restrictions and closures.
 - Recommendations on targeted testing of staff.
 - Support in communicating to staff, business partners, and the public.
 - On-site inspection of the workplace.
- Information must be provided to Toronto Public Health in a timely manner to help stop further spread of COVID-19.
- Consider enhanced cleaning and disinfecting measures to reduce the risk of disease spread in the workplace.

Reporting

- Know and communicate the rights and responsibilities of the [employer](#) and [staff](#) during COVID-19.
- Employees must report any circumstance that is likely to be hazardous to the health or safety of others in the workplace, including their own potential exposure to COVID-19 that caused or is likely to cause illness to the employee or to any other person.
- If you have been advised that one of your employees has tested positive due to an exposure at the workplace, report it to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB).
- Contact Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 for further guidance or questions.

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 Guidance: Workplace Outbreaks](#)

Government of Canada: [COVID-19: Your Rights and Responsibilities as an Employee](#)

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

As information changes frequently, please visit toronto.ca/COVID19 to stay up to date.