

Infrastructure Health and Safety Association

Guidance on construction facility hygiene 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.

For more information, visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

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](#).

Potential exposures for construction workers: On construction sites, workers could be exposed to infectious diseases through the following activities.

- Working in close proximity to others.
- Close contact with others during delivery of material and equipment.
- Exposure to contaminated areas in the cab when using a shared vehicle or piece of operating equipment.
- Touching possibly contaminated items during the course of the work, for example:
 - Tools and equipment
 - Construction materials and supplies
 - Pens when signing for pickups or deliveries
 - Electronic screens on devices like cell phones
 - Common surfaces such as handles on the entry door at facilities

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.

For more information, visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

- 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. Regular hand washing. Hand washing helps remove viruses and toxic materials from the skin. This prevents workers from spreading infectious diseases, developing skin reactions and ingesting hazardous chemicals.

- Workers must wash their hands after using the toilet; before eating, drinking, handling food or smoking; after coughing or blowing their nose; after contact with chemical agents.
- If soap and water are not available, apply alcohol-based (minimum 60%) hand sanitizer and remove visible soiling with paper towel, then reapply alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

2. Clean-up facilities. A well-maintained hand-washing facility helps eliminate infectious diseases and keeps workers safe from some of the toxic dusts and chemicals often found on construction sites. The constructor must provide the following:

- Clean-up facilities equipped with no fewer wash basins than half the number of toilets.
- Hot and cold running water where reasonably possible.
- Either paper towels and waste receptacles or a hand dryer.
- Soap and water or alcohol-based (minimum 60%) hand sanitizer that can be used without water and paper towels.
- Follow the material safety data sheet for hand cleaning instructions, which may require using water, soap and individual towels when workers handle or use corrosive, poisonous, or other substances.

Note: Although this is a fact-specific determination to be made by an inspector at a workplace, it is the position of the MLTSD that clean-up facilities complete with hot and cold water (or warm water) are, as a general matter, reasonable to provide by Constructors in almost all construction projects. Where it is not reasonably possible to have a wash basin with running water at a clean-up facility, the workplace parties, namely the constructor and employer must provide the rationale as to why “it is not reasonably possible”. Constructors can arrange to have facilities located up to 3km away in accordance with Section 29(6).

3. Toilets. An essential requirement to preventing the spread of germs on construction projects is access to toilets and clean-up facilities.

- Provide (or arrange for) water-flush toilets that are connected to a sanitary sewer, or chemical-flush toilets that are not connected to a sanitary sewer.
- Ensure that minimum numbers of toilets, as prescribed per number of workers

regularly employed at the project, are provided. Also, ensure that separate facilities for female workers are provided, unless the facilities are intended to be used by only one worker at a time. (See Tables 1 and 2 for the number of toilets.)

- Ensure that facilities are serviced as often as required.

Table 1: Determining the number of water-flush or non-recirculating chemical-flush toilets.

Number of workers regularly employed at the project	Minimum number of toilets
1-15	1
16-30	2
31-45	3
46-60	4
61 or more	4, plus 1 additional toilet for each additional group of 15 or fewer workers

Table 2: Determining the number of toilets that are not water-flush or non-recirculating chemical-flush toilets.

Number of workers regularly employed at the project	Minimum number of toilets
1-10	1
11-20	2
21-30	3
31-40	4
41 or more	4, plus 1 additional toilet for each additional group of 15 or fewer workers

Resource: [Section 28 – 30 of Ontario Regulation 213/91](#) prescribes the requirements for hygiene on construction projects.

4. Maintain physical distancing. Everyone in Ontario should be practicing physical distancing to reduce their exposure to other people. They should do their best to avoid close contact with people outside of their immediate families. Close contact includes being within two (2) meters (6 feet) of another person.

5. Stay home if you are feeling ill. If you detect symptoms, you should immediately distance yourself from others and go home. If possible, avoid using public transit. Ensure you notify your supervisor so that they are aware of the situation and can also notify others who may have been exposed.

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.

Follow-up and evaluation are essential to ensure the effectiveness of controls and solutions implemented. Review your process and identify any opportunities for improvement.

You should determine the following:

- Has the hazard been eliminated or the risk minimized appropriately?
- Is there a better way to control the risk?
- Is the control being used consistently and as planned? Monitor behavior and practices, and your improvement over time.
- Continuously engage your workers, and communicate recommendations and

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adjustments with supervisors.

Continuously monitor the necessary tools, supplies, and equipment needed to meet your control measures. Also ensure sufficient supplies are readily available, adequate, and accessible.

For Ontario residents, anyone who suspects that they have contracted COVID-should call Direct toll-free:1-866-797-0000 or TTY: 1-866-797-0007. Visit the Ontario Ministry of Health's website and take their [self-assessment](#).

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
- 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

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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.