

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Health and Safety for Agricultural Workers 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](#)
- [Duties of Employers and Other Persons](#)

BEST PRACTICES

We know that every workplace is unique which makes it so important that every workplace assess functions carried out by their workforce to ensure they take action to protect against the hazards presented by exposure to COVID-19.

Practicing physical distancing (staying 2 metres away from others), minimizing contact with droplets of mucous or saliva, keeping hands, surfaces and objects clean, and preventing contact with potentially infected people – are all critically important measures. Other information on how you can protect yourself is available on ontario.ca/coronavirus.

We have provided some recommendations below for your consideration. Please keep in mind that introducing any new protective measures should be done as part of a full review of other workplace hazards - not just COVID-19. Employers should consult with Joint Health and Safety Committees/Health and Safety Representatives on measures to protect workers in the workplace.

Some workplaces may already have some existing controls in place that may help reduce the risk of exposure to workers, so regular 'check-ins' on the effectiveness of controls is highly recommended.

RECOGNIZE HAZARDS AND ASSESS RISK

For agriculture workers, we recognize that you will have contact with workers and the public, and contact with work surfaces including animals, produce, products, and transportation equipment. You could potentially come in contact with droplets from these interactions. COVID-19 can travel in respiratory droplets that are released into the environment by laughing, coughing or sneezing.

Take a look at where you might minimize those risks within your place of worship. People who are sick or have signs of illness (e.g. fever, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, tiredness, shortness of breath) [should self-isolate](#). Consult [public health information](#) to learn more about the symptoms of COVID-19 infection Recognize and report these hazards and use appropriate controls. Ensure that you or your staff/volunteers stay home if you or they have symptoms.

Take a look at the controls below to see how they may assist you.

CONTROLS

Already existing controls may help to reduce the risk of exposure to workers (e.g. following food practices required by the Local/Provincial Health Unit and food safety practices enforced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency).

To protect yourself from some of the risk of exposure to COVID-19, consider the following options:

Keep Informed and Communicate

- All non-essential on-farm visits should be postponed.
- Communicate that it is not permitted for anyone to enter the business if individuals have symptoms of COVID-19. For example, install clear signage throughout the workplace, including the front desk and entry.
- Farm entry should be limited to personnel performing essential activities (i.e. those required for the care and wellbeing of your farm and farm animals, employees and facilities).
- Pre-authorized visitors to your farm (e.g. feed delivery, seed delivery, milk truck, veterinarian, farrier, etc.) should call ahead and schedule a meeting or drop-off time. Limit the number of visitors at any one time to reduce interactions. Designate and provide signage for a specified area where the interaction will take place.
- Screen visitors and staff regularly for health issues. This may include reminders on websites and via telephone messages. If anyone develops symptoms of COVID-19, implement procedures for reporting the illness and keeping the worker away from others. For further guidance on screening procedures, consult the [Ministry of Health](#).
- Ensure that illness reporting requirements are well communicated in the workplace through training and signage.
- People who are sick or have signs of illness (e.g. fever, coughing, runny nose, tiredness, shortness of breath [must self-isolate](#), notify their employer and call a doctor or healthcare provider*.
- Update your business's voicemail, email, social media, website and other external communications to inform customers of changes to the business operations.
- Employers need to train workers on possible COVID-19 transmission in the workplace, review what steps are being taken to protect them, and how they can protect themselves, including frequent hand washing, sanitizing items and surfaces more frequently, following tool disinfection procedures, and not touching their face.
- Follow all municipal and [local public health warnings](#), directions and recommendations related to COVID-19. Consider regular times to check in with public health updates and retrain/revise practices as needed.
- Share information in all languages spoken by your workers, if possible. Provide information in ways that are easy to understand, like graphics and pictures, and use resources from the Ontario government. [WSPS Sector Posters](#) are also available.
- Remind workers about available social and mental health supports, and encourage them to use these [resources](#).
- Share information to help your workers stay healthy while travelling between home and work.
- Ensure that measures you decide on are well communicated.

Eliminate or Minimize Exposure

Physical Distancing

Limit face-to-face contact wherever possible. Always ensure a minimum distance of 2 metres between yourself and others.

- Limit interactions by avoiding non-essential travel and multi-passenger transportation.
- Install physical distancing signage throughout the business depending on the size of the operation, including the entrance area outside the premises if appropriate.
- Limit the number of workers working in one space so that they can distance themselves from each other by:
 - Staggering shifts, and break times so they do not congregate in common spaces.
 - Scheduling more time for cleaning.
 - Practicing physical distancing during breaks.
 - Where possible, have their workstations or equipment positioned to maintain the physical distance.
- Limit number of face-to-face meetings. Consider alternatives such as conference calls or email.

Hand Hygiene

- Ensure all hand-washing facilities are available and in good working order.
- Proper handwashing is key. Workers should be trained in the proper hand washing technique and avoid touching their

face. Extra handwashing is a good idea for everyone – and when that’s not possible, a hand sanitizer with minimum alcohol content of 60% should be used frequently.

- Encourage workers and visitors to [clean and disinfect](#) before entering the workplace, after contact with others, or with surfaces others have touched. Be sure to include handwashing before breaks, at shift changes, after making or receiving deliveries, etc. Be sure to keep an adequate supply of soap, paper towels, etc.

Disinfection and Sanitizing

- Encourage workers to maintain clean workstations and equipment. Provide hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes for use. Consider having them available near the entryway and other high-traffic areas.
- Provide a safe place for individuals to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and disposable protective equipment. Empty and clean waste containers on a regular basis.
- Surfaces that come in contact with different workers and visitors must be disinfected prior to and after each interaction.
- Pay particular attention to frequently touched surfaces and common areas, such as entrances, handrails, counters, desks, door handles, switches and washrooms.
- Clean and disinfect/sterilize equipment such as tools, machinery, workstations, fridge/freezer doors, light switches, door knobs/handles (both sides), counters, tables, chairs, equipment controls, steering wheels, touch screens, handles and other equipment between employees. Visibly dirty surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water before disinfection. Public Health Ontario offers more information on [clean and disinfect](#) protocols.

OTHER CONTROL MEASURES

- Where appropriate, safely work/meet in outdoor spaces.
- Where appropriate, safely ventilate spaces by opening doors, etc.
- Ensure risk management and operational plans include pandemic plans. These plans should include identification of decision makers, roles and responsibilities, access to medical care, plans for quarantine and/or transportation to medical facilities. They should also include communications planning, such as: who is the point of contact, medical contacts, internal and external communication plans, staff contact information, suppliers, and community services.
- Limit physical signature requirements and utilize online and/or phone transactions wherever possible.
- If portable washrooms that include water for handwashing are not available for rent, running water could be provided by way of a large water jug which includes a spout or a pump, a soap dispenser and paper towels, in addition to the portable washroom.
- Make every reasonable effort to provide portable washroom facilities with handwashing and sanitation supplies.
- The risk management plan should also identify what to do if staff are not available to conduct time-sensitive work (e.g. milking, strawberry picking) when not enough employees are available to do the work because of illness.
- For any soiled uniforms, laundry etc., minimize shaking and disturbance; if possible, arrange to ensure the laundering of items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely and clean and disinfect hampers or other carts for transporting laundry and sanitation equipment.
- Install barriers or partitions between yourself and others, where close contact is necessary. For example, putting up barriers like “sneeze guards” around desks and workstations. If physical barriers or vehicle modifications are being considered, they should be compliant with the original equipment manufacturer requirements, all applicable federal and provincial legislation and not interfere with or affect the safe operation of the vehicle.
- Try to limit the number of employees using farm equipment. If possible, assign each employee to their own piece of equipment (e.g. tractor, truck, tool, etc.).

***NOTE:** Please be reminded that face coverings (non-medical masks) do not constitute PPE and are not an appropriate substitute for physical distancing in the workplace.

To learn more about PPE as well as face coverings, please refer to these sections in the Guide to Developing your Workplace COVID-19 Safety Plan at [ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca) or see the WSPS Pandemic Playbook [WSPS Pandemic Playbook](#).

POTENTIAL CASE OF, OR SUSPECTED EXPOSURE TO, COVID-19 AT YOUR WORKPLACE

There are steps that you will need to take if one of your workers has symptoms which may be related to COVID-19, or is diagnosed with COVID-19. For information regarding what to do, please refer to the information available on [ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca)

EVALUATION

COVID-19 has presented all of us with challenges we have never seen before. It's important to consider that any of the adjustments we are making today, may need further adjustment tomorrow.

It is recommended that you take a look at your preventative measures on an ongoing basis, and adjust them if they are not working well enough or causing other issues with your work. For example, if you decided to use goggles, but they are impeding your vision, or are making other tasks unnecessarily difficult, you may want to try a face shield instead. Or, if you decided you needed a certain kind of disinfectant that is no longer available, identifying alternative disinfecting products or solutions or switching to soap and water practices may be reasonable substitutes.

Bottom line? Plan to make regular check-ins and adjustments part of *your* COVID-19 infection prevention plans.

*For anyone who thinks they may have been exposed to or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, please start by visiting the Ministry of Health website and taking a [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

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

The Ontario government is supporting employers by setting up a portal to assist them in finding supplies and equipment through the [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#).

OTHER COVID-19 RESOURCES

[Health Canada](#) outlines the actions being taken by the Government of Canada to limit spread of 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.

For more information visit www.wsps.ca/COVID19

NOTE: This document is intended for informational purposes only to provide an overview of the potential hazards posed in the workplace due to COVID-19. It is not intended as medical advice, to provide a comprehensive risk assessment for all workplaces, or to replace any legislated workplace safety obligations. WSPS has not endorsed and does not endorse any particular product or company as a solution to the risk presented by COVID-19. Due to the ongoing evolution of the situation in Ontario and around the world, this document may be used as a guide for Employers in addition to guidance delivered by public health authorities such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Ontario Ministry of Health, Public Health Ontario and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Any use which is made of this document by any Employer or individual, or any reliance on or decisions to be made based on it, are the responsibility of the Employer or individual. WSPS and its partners, officers, directors, employees, agents, representatives, suppliers and service providers accept no responsibility for any errors or omissions in content or for damages of any kind or nature suffered by any Employer or any third party as a result of use of or reliance on this communication.