

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Health and Safety for Community Garden Sector 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 community gardeners and employees, we recognize that you will have contact with people including contact with surfaces, such as tools, equipment, machinery and surfaces. 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 workplace and community gardens. Consult public health information to learn the symptoms of COVID -19 infection. Recognize and report these hazards and use appropriate controls. Ensure that you or your co-workers stay home if you or they have symptoms.

We understand – so it's important to take a look at where you can possibly minimize those risks within your workplace. Take a look at the controls below to see how they may assist you.

CONTROLS

Here are a number of options for protecting community garden workers and the general public from exposure to COVID-19:

- Follow all municipal and local public health warnings, directions and recommendations related to COVID-19.

- Communicate that it is not permitted to enter the site if individuals have symptoms of COVID-19. For example, install clear signage throughout the site.
- Provide direction on how many people should be allowed in garden rows/boxes/areas and the distancing between people.
- Control and limit the number of people in a garden at one time.
- Practice physical distancing (staying 2 metres away from others) during garden activities.
- Where possible, assign staff to specific areas/locations to ensure people are following physical distancing protocols in areas likely to be congested. Restrict access to areas where more than 2 meters of distance cannot be maintained between people.
- Communicate on possible COVID-19 transmission points, what steps are being taken to protect people, and how they can protect themselves, including frequent hand washing or sanitizing, and not touching their face.
- Provide a safe place for individuals to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and personal protective equipment at the gardens.
- Provide waste containers for people to dispose of garden containers, bags and other waste materials.
- Increase cleaning and disinfecting on commonly touched surfaces like taps, baskets, buckets and (water) hose nozzles, tables. Encourage individuals to bring their own gardening supplies and tools. Sharing of various tools to other members of the public should be prohibited.
- Individuals should be sure to follow safe practices and use an appropriate cleaning agent for their tools. Public Health Ontario offers more information on [cleaning and disinfection](#) protocols.
- Gardens should consider supplying portable handwashing stations. Proper handwashing is key. Use [good hand washing technique](#) and avoid touching your 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. Disinfect your hands after interacting with other people and completing tasks.
- Consider regular times to check in with public health updates and retrain/revise practices as needed.
- Ensure that measures you decide on are well communicated.

OTHER CONTROLS

- Implement all measures to ensure physical distance and separation between people.
- Where appropriate, safely work/meet in outdoor spaces.
- Where appropriate, safely ventilate spaces by opening doors, etc.

In addition to the above recommendations, your workplace should consider protective equipment as part of a complete hazard assessment. Equipment is only effective if people understand its limitations and wear it correctly. Workers need to be trained in the fit, use, storage, cleaning, maintenance and limitations of the protective equipment that they wear. Workers must use protective equipment as required by their employer.

If physical distance and separation cannot be maintained, workers should have protective equipment consisting of surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (goggles or face shield).

EVALUATE

COVID-19 has presented challenges workplaces have never encountered before. Keep in mind that any adjustments made today may need readjusting tomorrow. Look at preventative measures on an ongoing basis, and adjust them if they are not working well enough or causing other issues. For example, are people doing what they've been asked to do? If not, what is preventing them from doing so? Can you make adjustments and improve?

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 and Long-Term Care website and taking a [self-assessment](#). Please do not visit an assessment centre unless you have been referred by a health care professional. Do not call 911 unless it is an emergency.

For additional information, refer to [Health Canada's website on COVID-19](#).

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. 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 any reliance on or decisions to be made based on it, are the responsibility of the Employer. 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.