

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Health and Safety for Food Retail 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

COVID-19 can cause a range of symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat and shortness of breath. These symptoms can appear in a few days or up to 14 days after being exposed to the virus. For some people, the symptoms are like having a cold; for others they may be severe or life-threatening.

The virus is transmitted via droplets during close, unprotected contact with an infected person, or by touching an infected surface and then the mouth, nose, or eyes.

Keeping safe at work involves understanding how people could come into contact with COVID-19 as they perform their jobs, and then taking steps to minimize contact.

People working as cashiers, office administrators, stock associates, produce or meat associates, shippers/receivers, customer service representatives, and maintenance staff are just some of those in the retail sector who need to consider how they can work safely and prevent the spread. The symptoms of COVID-19 are like many other illnesses, including the cold and flu. At this time, it is recommended that any worker who has any symptoms related to cold, flu or COVID-19 should be sent home.

In addition, employers should advise these workers to complete the online self-assessment or call either:

- Telehealth: 1-866-797-0000
- Their primary care provider (for example, family physician)

CONTROLS

Here are a number of options for protecting food retail workers from exposure to COVID-19:

- Provide online ordering, delivery or curb side pick up to reduce need for customers to enter your premises
- For delivery at customer sites (homes) – eliminate at-the-door payment methods (require online payment) and maintain physical distance.
- Train everyone on possible COVID-19 transmission points in the workplace, what steps are being taken to protect them, and how they can protect themselves, including frequent hand washing or sanitizing, and not touching their face.
- Train everyone on how to keep their work surfaces, order screens, debit machines, cash registers, and equipment clean.
- Provide hand sanitizer for visitors to use upon entry as well as sanitizing wipes to use on shopping carts and hand basket handles.
- Provide a safe place for customers to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and PPE in the parking lot.
- Provide delivery staff, cashier and other customer facing staff with hand sanitizer for their use only when receiving deliveries, interacting with the public etc.
- Have all employees and visitors wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available, 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.
- Control how many customers enter the workplace at one time. (metering entry/exit)
- Manage traffic flow and physical distancing with such measures as floor markings and barriers.
- Consider ways to minimize contact with customers and maintain a safe distance while handling goods and taking payment that may include:
 - Assign staff to ensure customers are following physical distancing protocols in areas likely to be congested (for example: check-out area)
 - Minimize or eliminate handling of cash, offer contactless payment options such as tap, credit and debit
 - Do not accept re-usable bags or containers that are to be handled by your staff
 - Install barrier between cashier and customer; this can include plexi-glass or markings on the floor to ensure at least 2 meters between customer and cashier
 - Ensure customers use new bags only or provide staff to bag items for customer using new bags only
- Pay particular attention to frequently touched surfaces and common areas, such as entrances, counters and washrooms.
- Limit the number of people working in one space so that they can distance themselves from each other by:
 - Staggering shifts and break times.
 - Practicing physical distancing during breaks.
 - Avoiding work areas where 2 meter distance cannot be maintained
 - Closing off areas to prevent large gatherings
- Sanitize the workplace thoroughly and often, especially frequently touched surfaces and common areas, such as door handles, entryways, elevators, washrooms, and kitchens.
- Sanitize surfaces and immediate area between each transaction if possible (For example – sanitize the counter, conveyor belt, plexi-glass barrier, etc.).
- Reschedule unnecessary visits to the workplace by supply chain partners, vendors, delivery people or others who don't need to be there now.
- Screen workers regularly for health issues. 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](#).

OTHER CONTROL MEASURES

- 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.

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.