

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Health and Safety for Veterinary Services (Pet Groomers/Dog Walkers/Pet Boarding/Animal Care Providers) 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

Animal care services can include veterinary services, pet groomers, dog walkers and kennels. It is recognized that the nature of the work completed within this sector can require activities in customer homes, close contact between co-workers and potentially customers (i.e. within 2 metres). These interactions, as well as the need to touch work surfaces and equipment could increase the likelihood that you or your customers could come in contact with the COVID-19 virus.

Take a look at where you might minimize those risks within your workplace. 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.

Take a look at the controls below to see how they may assist you in protecting you and co-workers from exposure to COVID-19.

CONTROLS

All existing safety, sanitation, and infection control standards established by licensing agencies and public health authorities are still in effect and enforced. Already existing controls may help to reduce the risk of exposure for workers (e.g. following practices required by the Local/Provincial Health Unit and referencing the [Ontario Veterinary Medical Association](#))

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

KEEP INFORMED AND COMMUNICATE

- 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.
- Update the business's voicemail, email, social media, website and other external communications, and create a visible sign for your door to inform customers of changes to the business operations.
- Screen customers and staff regularly for health issues. This may include reminders to customers 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](#).
- 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.
- 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.
- Train workers on where COVID-19 transmission points may exist within the workplace, steps being taken to protect them from the virus and how they can protect themselves (including frequent hand washing or sanitizing, and not touching their face with unwashed hands).
- If using a third party delivery service, ensure that they are up-to-date with the latest COVID-19 prevention knowledge and are following safe practices.

ELIMINATE OR MINIMIZE EXPOSURE

Customers and Business Procedures:

- Consider taking customers by appointment only and have customers book online and by phone only, restricting walk-ins.
- Provide hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipes for customers to use if entry is required. Consider having them available near the entryway, waiting areas, at reception and other high-traffic areas. Have a safe place for proper disposal of wipes. Empty and clean waste containers on a regular basis.
- Consider limiting the business customer capacity if unable to maintain physical distancing. When booking appointments consider the flow of workers and pet owners to minimize interaction and contact.
- Limit handling cash and have customers use debit, credit, tap. Consider having customers pre-pay online for services where possible, by debit, credit, or e-transfer.
- Eliminate restrictions and penalties on cancellations to encourage clients to reschedule if they are feeling unwell.
- Consider ways to minimize contact between workers and pet owners during drop off and pick up, and inform customers of safe work practices:
 - Establish clear visuals to show where the designated pickup area is located and the boundaries of the pickup area.
 - Have customers schedule and call first before picking up and dropping off.
 - Consider having workers assigned their own pet leashes/leads and inform customers that their leads and other items such as pet clothes, harnesses, etc. will not be permitted to remain in the workplace.
- Waiting areas inside your business should be closed and not available to the public. Consider signage at the door to inform the public, and inform your customers of this online/during booking.
- Where necessary, permit a maximum of one healthy adult to accompany the pet to a medical visit and for that person to wait in a designated area or their vehicle. Ask for verbal or electronic consent rather than requiring signatures on any authorization documents.

Mobile Services:

- Mobile services should be conducted outside the customer household in a safe space with the pet secured (in vehicle, garage, fenced yard, enclosed porch, etc.). Refrain from entering the home.
- If mobile services are used, ensure that the service can be provided while maintaining physical distancing between individuals.
- Clean and disinfect the area inside your vehicle if services were undertaken inside, including any tools used.
- If pets must be fed in their homes, ask the owner to leave the food and dish close to the entry way of the home to minimize the time and surfaces touched in the client's home. Ensure you follow proper hand hygiene.
- Minimize the amount of time that you spend in clients homes, if entry is required.
- If the client is at home, maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres during interactions.
- Dog walkers should avoid walking in congested areas. Seek out routes that are uncrowded so that you can minimize your interaction with others.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- Review the layout of the workspace to consider where workers and/or pet owners may be required to interact. Rearrange the space to maintain a minimum of 2 meters between people. Consider waiting areas, reception area, exam rooms and grooming areas.
- Install physical distancing markers throughout the reception area and other areas depending on the size of the facility, including the entrance area outside the premises if appropriate, to ensure customers maintain physical distance of 2 metres.
- Consider installing clear partitions in the reception area to protect front office workers.
- Do not permit customers to hold animals during an exam or other procedures. Where possible, safely restrain the animal to avoid having multiple workers working in close proximity to complete grooming or other services.
- Limit the number of workers working in one space so that they can distance themselves from each other by:
 - Staggering shifts and break times and schedule more time for cleaning in between customers.
 - Practicing physical distancing during breaks.
 - Where possible, have their workstations or chairs positioned to maintain the physical distance

DISINFECTING AND SANITIZING

- Consider having disinfecting wipes and sanitizer at key areas for your workers, including their workstations. Provide a safe place for individuals to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and personal protective equipment. Empty and clean waste containers on a regular basis.
- Clean and disinfect all areas, instruments and equipment, including leashes/leads, grooming tools, tables, floors, etc. between each appointment.
- Ensure medical tools are properly disinfected/sterilized between appointments.
- Clean the workplace thoroughly and often and pay particular attention to frequently touched surfaces and common areas such as entrances, counters, work stations and washrooms.
- Main entrance area including door handles and counters need to be sanitized with each entry or exit. Public Health Ontario offers more information on [cleaning and disinfection](#) protocols.
- Where possible, assign a worker to ensure staff and customers are utilizing sanitizing materials, following physical distancing protocols and screening for customers presenting COVID-19 related symptoms.

HAND HYGIENE

- Ensure 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 [wash their hands](#) 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.

OTHER CONTROL MEASURES

- Limit the number of people sharing equipment or tools (for example, leashes, scissors, clippers etc.). If possible, assign each employee a unique set of tools for their use only.
- Limit petting or cuddling the animals you work with.
- Implement all measures to ensure physical distance and separation between people.
- Where appropriate, safely work/meet in outdoor spaces.
- Where appropriate, recommend ventilating 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.