

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services Guidance on Health and Safety for Retail Sector Employers and Employees 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.

Below is a set of resources, tips and best practices to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Make sure to follow any requirements and public health orders. You should be aware of the most current:

- requirements of the [local public health unit](#)
- relevant bylaws in the municipality in which you do business
- requirements under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act](#) that are applicable to your business
- [directives issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health](#) that are applicable to your industry or business

Employers and workers in Ontario have certain duties and rights under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)* and its regulations.

To learn more about those rights, refer to the following links:

- [Workers' Rights](#)
- [Duties of Employers and Other Persons](#)

Note: Employers should consult the COVID-19 response framework available at [this link](#) to determine additional workplace requirements for their region.

BEST PRACTICES

We know that every workplace is unique which makes it so important that every employer assess functions carried out by their workforce to ensure they take action to protect against the hazards presented by exposure to COVID-19. The Ontario government has developed a guide to help employers develop and maintain a [COVID-19 workplace safety plan](#). The guide provides a framework for assessing risks of COVID-19 transmission and planning how to mitigate those risks. According to the [Re-opening Ontario Act](#), all businesses, including all those operating during a lockdown or shutdown, must have a written safety plan by law. Visit the [COVID-19 safety checklist](#), where employers can ensure their COVID-19 workplace safety plan contains all key elements to help protect workers, customers and the general public.

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, your workers and your clients 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 control measures in place that may help reduce the risk to workers. Regular 'check-ins' on the effectiveness of controls is highly recommended.

RECOGNIZE HAZARDS AND ASSESS RISK

For cashiers, sales staff, retail general labourers and other retail sector staff, we recognize that you will have contact with people, including customers, suppliers and co-workers (i.e. within 2 metres). 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. These interactions, as well as the need to touch surfaces, could increase the likelihood that you or your customers could come in contact with the virus.

Take a look at where you might minimize those risks within your work environment. Consult [public health information](#) to learn more about the symptoms of COVID-19. Ensure that you stay home if you have symptoms. Take a look at the controls below to see how they may assist you.

CONTROLS

Existing controls may help to reduce the risk of exposure for workers. Follow the requirements and guidance of your local public health unit.

To protect against exposure to COVID-19, consider the following options:

Keep Informed and Communicate

- Perform screening of workers or essential visitors in accordance with [regulations](#). Refer to [on-site health screening](#) guidance for additional information. Screen staff and customers for COVID-19 symptoms and other risk factors (for example, close contact to known cases, recent international travel) before each in-person interaction. If anyone develops symptoms of COVID-19, implement procedures for keeping the individual away from others. For further guidance on screening procedures, consult the [Ministry of Health](#). Ensure measures are in place to prevent anyone from missing the screening protocol.
- Make sure it is clear that no-one is permitted to enter the premises if they have symptoms of COVID-19. For example, install clear signage at points of entry. Consult [public health information](#) to learn more about the symptoms of COVID-19. People with symptoms of COVID-19 should self-isolate, notify their employer and call a doctor or healthcare provider.
- 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, tiredness, shortness of breath) **must self-isolate**, notify their employer and call a doctor or healthcare provider.
- Encourage workers to monitor their own symptoms at all times and ensure that they know where to find assessment tools. Ask workers to use the tool at home if they have any symptoms and to follow the instructions. Ensure workers know who their workplace contact is and how to get in touch with them in case the self-assessment, public health or their health care provider suggests they self-isolate, or if they start to experience symptoms at work.
- Ensure workers with symptoms self-isolate and check in regularly with these individuals throughout their isolation period.
- If you own a business, you must develop a COVID-19 safety plan to assist in putting the controls into place to make work activities safer for everyone. Talk to your workers and your JHSC members or health and safety representatives, if any, for their input on the plan. Share the plan with all workplace parties when it is done. This will help ensure your workers and others understand how you plan to manage the risks of COVID-19. Review, evaluate and update your plan regularly. For more information to help create your safety plan, refer to [Ontario.ca](#) and the [WSPS Pandemic Playbook](#).
- Provide clear information and instruction to your workers and customers. Make sure they know what they need to do to protect themselves and others. Ensure they know how to follow the work and hygiene practices in your plan, including all new safety measures. Employers need to train workers 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 especially before and after each client interaction, sanitizing items and surfaces more frequently, following tool disinfection procedures, and not touching their face.
- Post signage at your business entry outlining the safety protocols that must be followed prior to entering (e.g. hand sanitizing, physical distancing, masks or face coverings to be worn, etc.).
- Update your business's voicemail, email, social media, website and other external communications to inform clients of changes to the business operations.
- Follow all municipal and [local public health warnings](#), directions and recommendations related to COVID-19. Consider establishing regular times to check in with public health updates and retrain/revise practices as needed.
- Share information in all languages spoken by your workers and clients, 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 commuting or travelling for work.
- Ensure that measures you decide on are well communicated.

Eliminate or Minimize Exposure

Physical Distancing

- Install physical distancing markers throughout the facility, including the entrance area outside the premises if appropriate, to ensure customers maintain a physical distance of 2 metres.
- 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 scheduling more time for cleaning in between customers.
 - Practicing physical distancing during breaks.
 - Where possible, have workstations or chairs positioned to maintain the physical distance.
 - Consider installing transparent barriers where physical distancing is not an option.

Disinfection and Sanitizing

- Encourage workers to maintain clean workstations, debit machines, cash registers, counters, and equipment. Provide hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes for clients to use upon entry. Consider having them available near the entryway, waiting areas, at reception 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 customers must be disinfected prior to and after each customer service performed.
- Clean and disinfect/sanitize equipment and commonly touched surfaces such as payment terminals, keypads, serving counters, door handles, switches, cart handles, and any other equipment or surfaces. Visibly dirty surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water before disinfection. Be sure to use appropriate cleaner and disinfectants for the job and follow safe use practices as indicated on the Safety Data Sheets. Public Health Ontario offers more information on [cleaning and disinfection](#) protocols.
- Ensure that the use of chemicals does not result in adverse effects (example – dermatitis, respiratory illness) by using chemicals only at the concentration recommended by the manufacturer. Purchase cleaning chemicals that are ready-to-use if you do not have facilities in place to dilute and dispense concentrated products. Always refer to Safety Data Sheets and manufacturer instructions to determine the correct dilution and any personal protective equipment requirements while handling the product.

Hand and Respiratory Hygiene

- Ensure all hand-washing facilities are available and in good working order.
- 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.
- To avoid droplet dispersion, encourage proper cough and sneeze etiquette through the use of posted reminders and other communications.
- Encourage the wearing of face coverings or masks when indoors, even if not required by local or provincial regulations.

Customer

- Consider limiting customer capacity if unable to maintain physical distancing.
- Consider minimizing or eliminating exposures by having customers pre-pay electronically when possible.
- If applicable, consider only taking customers by appointment and have customers book online and by phone only, restricting walk-ins.

- 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.
- Remove chairs from the waiting area to make sure people do not sit close together or wait in groups.
- Any waiting or reception areas for your customers should have books, service menus, pens and other frequently touched items removed.
- Where possible, assign workers to ensure staff and customers are utilizing sanitizing materials, following physical distancing protocols and screening for customers presenting COVID-19 related symptoms.

OTHER CONTROL MEASURES

- Limit the number of people sharing equipment or tools. Assign tools, equipment and workstations to a single user if possible, or limit the number of users.
- Where appropriate, safely work/meet in outdoor spaces.
- Where appropriate, recommend ventilating spaces by opening doors.
- Limit the number of access doors and consider one way flow of traffic (e.g. entrance and exit that maintains physical distancing), where possible.
- Consider remote meetings with suppliers via phone, email, and other video/tele-conferencing technology.
- Rearrange the retail floor to allow for one way customer flow down aisles and prevent two-way traffic.
- Offer online ordering and/or [curbside pickup or delivery](#) .
- Consider restricting customer in-store trial of items (e.g. clothing fit) and/or set aside items that have been trialed from the floor for a period of time.
- Consider taking public water fountains, if any, out of service.
- If using a third party delivery service, ensure they are up-to-date with the latest COVID-19 prevention knowledge and are following safe practices.

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 that may 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.

***NOTE:** Please be reminded that face coverings 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](#) or see the [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](#) or you may find additional information on [workplace outbreak guidance](#) here.

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 are 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:

- [COVID-19 Ontario](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)

Ontario government and agency-issued resources about COVID-19

The Ontario government is providing guidance and resources to [help businesses](#) and employers operate more safely and stop the spread. This includes a portal to assist them in finding supplies and equipment through the [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#).

[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 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

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers

This site provides information and tools to assist workers and workplaces in navigating the unique challenges that COVID-19 presents.

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. The information is current, to the best of our knowledge, as of the publication date, (Feb 2021). 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 U.S. 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.