

# Construction site health and safety during COVID-19

Find resources, best practices and information to help construction employers understand their rights and responsibilities while operating during COVID-19.

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## Overview

**This is not a legal document and employers are advised to seek legal advice.**

Employers and constructors have obligations to protect workers from hazards in the workplace as set out in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations and the directives coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Workers should raise any concerns to their:

- supervisor
- joint health and safety committee
- health and safety representative

This will help ensure the employer has taken all reasonable precautions.

Ontario is currently in the midst of a global pandemic. While the COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly, the legislation and regulations used to govern Ontario's workplaces are not.

Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to keep workers and work sites safe and free of hazards. Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work. If health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can seek enforcement by filing a complaint with the ministry's Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008. Failure of the employer or constructor to comply with the OHSA and its regulations could result in a stop-work order upon inspection by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

## On-site best practices

The health and safety of workers is a top concern amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, all parties must place an increased focus on health and safety in order to keep job sites open.

All measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should be done in compliance with requirements under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and associated regulations and public health directives issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

In addition, below are a set of resources, tips and best practices to help employers prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## Protecting yourself and your co-workers

Coronaviruses are spread through close contact, including at work. Here are some helpful tips to help prevent the spread of germs:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Sneeze and cough into your sleeve.
- If you use a tissue, discard immediately and wash your hands afterward.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid high-touch areas, where possible, or ensure you clean your hands after.
- Where possible, wear gloves when interacting with high-touch areas. Do not touch your face with gloved hands. Take care when removing gloves. Ensure you wash your hands after removing them.
- Wash your clothes as soon as you get home.
- If you are ill: notify your supervisor immediately, complete the [self-assessment \(https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0\)](https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0) and follow the instructions you get.

## Reporting illness

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 \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-self-assessment\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-self-assessment) or **call either:**

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

Please note that additional resources, policies and procedures are being developed to provide additional support in this area.

## Getting information on infection prevention and control

Employers can contact local public health units for questions on workplace infection prevention and control related to COVID-19 infections. Please note additional resources, policies and procedures are being developed to provide additional support in this area.

## Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development reporting requirements

Employers must report all known positive test results for COVID-19, to:

- the ministry (in writing) within four days
- the joint health and safety representative

- a trade union (if applicable)

## **Share information**

It is important that all parties in a workplace communicate their roles and responsibilities. Employers will need to ensure health and safety policies are updated and posted for all employees to see. Using industry resources, including this one and those produced by the Infrastructure Health & Safety Association (IHSA), will improve on-site understanding.

## **Post your policies**

All employers/constructors need to post and communicate COVID-19 policies to employees and contractors or trades.

These policies should cover how the site will operate, including, but not limited to:

- the sanitization of sites
- how employees and contractors report illnesses
- how to ensure physical distancing
- how work will be scheduled

## **Physical distancing (two metres)**

As advised by the Chief Medical Officer, public health officials, and outlined throughout government communications, physical distancing is required to control the spread of COVID-19.

In order to ensure physical distancing on site, employers should consider:

- staggering start times
- staggering breaks
- staggering lunches
- restricting the number of people on-site and where they are assigned to work
- controlling site movement (by limiting the potential for workers to gather, including personnel in material hoists and site trailers)
- limiting the number of people who use elevators and hoists at one time
- holding meetings in an outside or large space to enable physical distancing
- limiting unnecessary on-site contact between workers, and between workers and outside service providers, and encourage physical distancing in these areas (for example, by removing coffee trucks from site)

## **On-site sanitation**

Coronaviruses are spread person to person through close contact, including at work. While employers always have an obligation to maintain clean worksites, that obligation is under sharper focus during an outbreak like the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Employers should focus on:

- access to soap and water (ways to properly clean hands) or alcohol-based hand sanitizer

- washroom facilities
- sanitizing commonly touched surfaces or areas (hoists, site trailers, door handles, equipment, residential units)
- avoiding the sharing of hand tools and power tools. If sharing is necessary, enable sanitization of shared equipment.
- posting signage on hygiene in English and the majority workplace language so everyone can understand how to do their part

## **Adjust on-site and production schedules**

Physical distancing will result in lower staffing on job sites. In order to keep sites open, employers will need to adjust production schedules as the impacts of physical distancing become clear. Owners and trades will need to collaborate to ensure there is a clear understanding of how production will be impacted.

Schedules should consider:

- limiting number of workers to critical number by staggering work schedules
- sanitation of sites and workspaces
- site planning to facilitate appropriate physical distancing (two metres) between workers during any particular shift
- work-site mobility and transportation, including hoist operations

## **Track and monitor your workforce**

Due to the latency period of COVID-19, it is important to track where employees have worked. If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will ask employers to provide information on where the employee worked as well as the contact information of any other employee who may have been exposed. Employers will track information and Public Health Units will respond.

## **Construction sector and design industry resources**

There are a host of additional resources available to help address COVID-19 that are aimed at the construction and design industries, including:

- [The Canadian Construction Association's online Pandemic Preparedness Guide \(https://www.cca-acc.com/covid-19-resources/\)](https://www.cca-acc.com/covid-19-resources/)
- [IHSA COVID-19 updates \(https://www.ihsa.ca/Urgent-Notices/COVID-19-Main.aspx\)](https://www.ihsa.ca/Urgent-Notices/COVID-19-Main.aspx)
- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers online resource \(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html)

## **Resources**

### **COVID-19 government updates**

Stay updated with daily government updates:

- [Government of Ontario \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus)
- [Government of Canada \(http://www.canada.ca/coronavirus\)](http://www.canada.ca/coronavirus)
- [Public Health Ontario \(https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus\)](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus)

## Ontario government and agency-issued resources about COVID-19

The [Ontario Ministry of Health \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus) 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 \(https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus\)](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus) 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 \(https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html\)](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html) 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 \(https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019\)](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019) 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

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