

CLEANERS AND JANITORS



CONFRONTING COVID-19

Updated December 2020

Working during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Concerned about your health and safety?



TRAINING

► THE RIGHT THING. THE RIGHT WAY.

Health and safety law says **your employer must take every reasonable precaution to protect you**. But what is reasonable in the circumstances? The precautionary principle should guide all actions. In other words, the absence of scientific certainty should not prevent prudent actions. **Consider the following.**

According to health and research authorities the **COVID-19 virus can survive on surfaces for hours and even days** depending on the surface. Generally, the harder the surface the longer it lasts. As such, proper cleaning and disinfecting is crucial to prevent the spread of the virus. While we have developed a number of cleaning and disinfecting related information resources, which we have posted with others to our [COVID-19 web hub](#), this resource is intended to help safeguard the health of workers who perform these critical tasks. Specifically, it is intended for cleaners and janitors who work in spaces other than health care facilities.

The following recommendations are **offered in addition to recommendations** for all important [enhanced ventilation](#) and water management systems to combat the potential for [legionella](#) in buildings that have sat idle for any period of time.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PRECAUTIONS

When using or preparing **cleaning and disinfecting solutions**, precautions should include:

- ▶ Review safety data sheets (SDS) for all cleaners and disinfectants to be used.
- ▶ Wherever possible consider using safer cleaning and disinfecting solutions whose active ingredients include ethanol, isopropanol (isopropyl alcohol), hydrogen peroxide, L-Lactic acid, or citric acid.
- ▶ When preparing solutions (especially bleach), always follow manufacturer's instructions for proper use of products — such as recommended dilution, material compatibility, storage, shelf-life, and safe use and disposal.
- ▶ Wear personal protective equipment (PPE), especially appropriate gloves, as indicated on the manufacturer's instructions or safety data sheets (SDS) (for general advice see below).
- ▶ Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner, in fact do not mix any cleaning chemicals, as they may create a hazardous and even deadly gas.

NOTE: All workers, including cleaners and janitors, must be properly trained in Globally Harmonized WHMIS. Namely, this training must result in the workers being able to use information required by WHMIS to protect their health and safety [s. 7(3), WHMIS Reg.]. This training must be developed and implemented in consultation with the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative. See Workers Health & Safety Centre [WHMIS Resources](#) for details.



Before, during and after cleaning and disinfecting, precautions should also include:

- ▶ Close off the area to other people and wait as long as possible before cleaning and disinfection. (Wait at least 30 minutes if routine or 24 hours if responding after a person is suspected, presumed or confirmed as infected with COVID-19. However, waiting 72 hours is ideal in this latter situation.)
- ▶ Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation and enhance the ventilation system where possible. (i.e., assessed by certified technician, increase ventilation rate, high efficiency filters, air purification technologies.)
- ▶ Do not touch your face or hair at any time after you start cleaning and before removing gloves.
- ▶ Do not use compressed air or water sprays to clean potentially contaminated surfaces as these techniques may suspend the virus into the air.
- ▶ Do not shake dirty laundry. (This way you minimize potential of dispersing the virus through the air.)
- ▶ Use gloves appropriate in the circumstances. If using disposable gloves, they should be changed after a certain period of time or after cleaning a single room or area (specifics should be determined by workplace policy with input from JHSC or health and safety representative).
- ▶ After use, remove and dispose of gloves safely in a plastic-lined, non-touch (or open) waste bin.
- ▶ If re-usable gloves are used, ensure they are cleaned and disinfected after cleaning a room or area (specifics of this should also be determined by workplace policy).
- ▶ Properly wash or sanitize hands immediately before putting on gloves and after removal.
- ▶ If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol. ([Health Canada](#) offers a list of recalled hand sanitizing products you should not use.)
- ▶ Wash clothing worn in accordance with manufacturer's instruction, using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely.



SOCIAL (PHYSICAL) DISTANCING

Self-isolation for those with COVID-19, those experiencing symptoms and those who were exposed to a presumed or confirmed case is essential. In fact, for workers or suppliers coming to work, employers are required to implement a [screening process](#) prior to arrival or when they first enter the workplace. **Should anyone fail the screening, they should be denied entry and advised to self-isolate**, call their health care provider or Telehealth Ontario (1.866.797.000) for additional guidance on whether or not they require a COVID-19 test.

Employers should also dedicate a location to isolate people who become ill at work until they can leave. (Surgical masks should be provided to these workers to help catch potentially infected respiratory droplets.)

For information on when workers are cleared to reenter the workforce consult the Ontario's Ministry of Health [guidance document](#).

NOTE: Employers must report (in writing within four days) all known, work-related, positive test results for COVID-19 to the Ministry of Labour, the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative, and trade union (if applicable).

For workplaces open to the public, notices should be posted at all entrances advising them not to enter if they are unwell or returning within the past 14 days from international travel.

Ensuring at least two metres distance between cleaners and janitors plus suppliers and the public (where applicable) is also critical. To achieve this, employers should:

- ▶ Reduce number of workers, suppliers and the public in the workplace at any one time (i.e., cease non-essential work, stagger/ shorten work hours plus lunch and breaks, customers admitted in limited numbers)
- ▶ Visually communicate a two-metre distance (i.e., install floor markers, or employ staff to manage this distance in line ups, while ensuring this staff maintains their distance too.)
- ▶ Erect plexiglass barriers, particularly when two metres cannot be maintained between workers, or workers and the public
- ▶ Provide dedicated carts and equipment for each worker wherever possible (Any shared resources must be cleaned thoroughly between use.)
- ▶ Wherever possible establish a policy of only cleaning areas (especially smaller rooms) when others are not in them (Use signage to indicate the area is closed for cleaning.)



PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Before using PPE, employers should first work with joint health and safety committees, worker health and safety representatives (and union reps where applicable) to examine all the ways in which workers may be exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Then consider the precautions promoted by public health authorities, including enhanced ventilation and social distancing and how best to implement them.

Remember when PPE is deemed necessary, great care must be taken in its selection, use, cleaning, laundering and disposal. Also keep in mind, some PPE can cause a false sense of security, offers limited protection and can also increase the risk of infection if used improperly.

In terms of **non-medical masks and face coverings**, the position taken by public health authorities has evolved significantly. The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), for instance, now recognizes these masks as both a source control blocking the release of exhaled respiratory droplets and aerosols and as personal protection for the mask wearer. They add however the level of mask protection is dependent on design, fit and materials used. See the **WHSC COVID-19: [Respiratory and Eye Protection](#)** resource document for details.

Here in Ontario, the **universal use of masks** or face coverings that cover the nose, mouth and chin is **now mandatory** in all indoor public spaces, including workplaces (even those not open to the public) and on public transit.

In addition to face masks, **examples of appropriate PPE** for cleaners and janitors include:

- ▶ Gloves, compatible with disinfectant products being used. Ensure proper fit. (Gloves that are too big can allow water, chemicals or the virus to enter. Gloves that are too small can rip or tear.)
- ▶ Face shields (or goggles) especially if there is a potential for splash (These must be worn as a supplement to face masks, not a substitute.)
- ▶ Disposable gowns or if gowns are not available, coveralls, aprons or work uniforms can be worn (Re-useable (washable) clothing should be laundered afterwards.)
- ▶ Shoe covers (dispose after use or launder) or dedicated shoes that can be cleaned and disinfected.
- ▶ Fit tested N-95 respirator, [recommended equivalent](#) or higher level of respiratory protection such as a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR), if cleaning and disinfecting an area where a suspected, presumed or confirmed person with COVID-19 worked or visited.



NOTE: Industrial N95 masks designed with an exhale valve are not a recommended equivalent to medical N95 masks and should not be used to protect against COVID-19. Although the mask protects the wearer, the valve has the potential to emit the virus if present and infect others. If using an industrial N95 mask to protect against a hazard other than COVID-19, then wear another mask over it.

Prior to any cleaning tasks, training on proper use and limitations of personal protective equipment (PPE) must be provided, including putting on and removal of PPE, proper disposal, and how to properly clean, disinfect and maintain reusable PPE after and between uses.



TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Keeping workers, customers and other third parties informed about the most current information about COVID-19 including precautionary measures is critical. Public health authorities warn, non-medical masks, nor PPE alone will prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and must be used as part of a wide range of controls. **Consider posting at entrances**, checkouts, washrooms, hand washing/sanitizing stations, lunch rooms and other highly travelled public areas guidance on proper hand hygiene, proper cough and sneeze etiquette, cleaning and disinfecting and social distancing along with the screening protocol that must be in place prior to entering establishments.

In addition to WHMIS and PPE training mentioned above, by law, employers must provide information and instruction to workers to protect their health and safety. **Training is a key way** employers meet this obligation. WHSC COVID-19 training, offered through [WHSC virtual classrooms](#), can assist workplaces seeking to achieve compliance. Properly trained, [certified JHSC members](#) are also mandatory and critical to securing safer, healthier workplaces.

FURTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Review our other COVID-19 resources at www.whsc.on.ca.

Contact a [WHSC Training Services Representative](#) directly, or reach out to us at contactus@whsc.on.ca or [1-888-869-7950](tel:1-888-869-7950).

Additional advice from Ontario's Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development

OVERVIEW

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, work sites and all workplaces 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 of their rights 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.

BEST PRACTICES

These are covered in the Workers Health & Safety Centre document above. Other WHSC COVID-19 resources found at www.whsc.on.ca.

For more information on worker's rights and employer obligations under health and safety law,

including the worker right to refuse unsafe work, check out Workers Health & Safety Centre [online worker OHS rights posters](#) or the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) section of the WHSC website.

RESOURCES

Stay updated with daily government updates on COVID-19:

[Government of Ontario](#)

[Government of Canada](#)

[Public Health Ontario](#).