

# FACTORY AND WAREHOUSE WORKERS

## 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.

Whether you are a warehouse worker or a factory worker employed in food processing or the manufacturing of other goods, 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.**

## HYGIENE AND CLEANING

Hygiene is essential. Hygiene notices (i.e., avoid touching your face, sneeze/cough etiquette and proper hand washing) should be posted in all workplace entrances, loading docks, washrooms, hand washing stations, lunch rooms and public areas.

For couriers and other truck drivers, suppliers, contractors, customers and other third parties entering the workplace **hand sanitizer** should be made available and posters advising use must be clearly visible. In fact, workplace entry protocol should be shared with all third parties by email or other means. Hand sanitizer is effective if it contains at least 60 per cent alcohol. [Health Canada](#) offers a list of recalled hand sanitizing products that should not be used.

**Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting** is also a must considering health and research authorities agree 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.) Disinfecting should take place between shifts and at other times as deemed necessary (at least twice daily).

[Health Canada](#) and the [U.S. EPA](#) offer lists of acceptable disinfectant products for use against the COVID-19 virus. However, 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.

**You should also have ready access to:**

- ▶ Time for frequent and thorough hand washing
- ▶ Tissues to catch coughs and sneezes
- ▶ Non touch (or open) waste disposal receptacles (plus adequate and safe waste removal throughout shift and at shift change)
- ▶ Disinfecting wipes or disinfectant products and paper towels for use during work shifts on commonly touched surfaces and equipment (i.e., doorknobs, light switches, machinery and equipment operation panels) (Be sure to wash or sanitize hands too following disinfecting surfaces.)
- ▶ Cleaning, disinfecting, flushing, and maintaining water systems (including systems conveying metalworking fluids) in workplaces that have been closed or operating at considerably reduced capacity, in order to prevent the growth of harmful [legionella bacteria](#).
- ▶ Clean work wear and PPE (This includes hand, eye and other protection normally used to protect against work hazards other than COVID-19. Clean/laundry as soon as possible after use. Laundry in accordance with manufacturer's instruction, using the hottest appropriate water setting and dry items completely.)
- ▶ Hand washing facilities with hot water, soap and single-use hand towels
- ▶ Hand sanitizer when hand washing facilities are not accessible

## SOCIAL (PHYSICAL) DISTANCING

Self-isolation for those with COVID-19 or those experiencing symptoms or those who were exposed to a presumed or confirmed case is essential. In fact, for all workers, contractors, suppliers and many other third parties entering work premises, 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 (1.866.797.0000) for additional guidance on whether or not they require a COVID-19 test.

In addition to the screening process, posters at entrance points should advise everyone not to enter the premises if they are unwell or returning within the past 14 days from international travel.

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

**NOTE:** Employers must report (in writing and 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).



**Adequate space between workers**, or third parties in the workplace, is critical. When possible, your employer should:

- ▶ Reduce numbers in the workplace, entry/exit points and break rooms (i.e., cease non-essential work, staggered work hours and breaks and limit customers)
- ▶ Modify work and/or workstations to allow for two metre social distance and realign so workers do not face each other
- ▶ Offer contactless deliveries and pick up
- ▶ Erect physical barriers such as plexiglass particularly when two metres cannot be maintained
- ▶ Establish other systems to maintain at least a two-metre distance
  - ▷ Mark the floor to communicate this distance
  - ▷ Mark aisles to indicate traffic flow goes in one direction only
- ▶ Organize work so one worker handles one type of material
- ▶ Dedicate work stations, equipment and tools for each worker (Shared tools, equipment and other resources must be cleaned and disinfected between use.).

## ENHANCED VENTILATION

With research confirming the airborne transmission of the COVID-19 virus often beyond the two metre social distancing rule, [enhanced ventilation](#), filtration and maintenance is perhaps even more important. In response, [public health officials](#) have joined globally-recognized standards setting organizations and [some experts](#) to promote enhanced ventilation aimed at reducing airborne transmission in indoor work environments and public spaces.

The following are just a few examples of enhanced measures:

- ▶ Assess the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system to ensure it is functioning properly using a certified technician (especially prior to reopening after temporary shutdown)
- ▶ Increase ventilation rate and run system longer than normal (24/7 if possible)
- ▶ Use high efficiency filters (minimum value MERV-13 or higher) and ensure they are within service life and installed properly
- ▶ Employ air purification technologies such as high efficiency particulate air (HEPA), activated charcoal, and electrostatic filtration systems, as well as ultraviolet irradiation
- ▶ Ensure relative humidity levels in the workplace are kept between 40 and 60 per cent, if possible
- ▶ Increase amount of clean outdoor air circulating into the system to dilute contaminated air
- ▶ Ensure air from the breathing zone of one person is not flowing directly into the breathing zone of another (This is especially important for workers who remain on an assembly line or stationary at one work station throughout their shift.).



## 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 those mentioned above, 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. For instance, for most non-health care workers, including factory and warehouse workers, nitrile (synthetic rubber) **gloves to protect against COVID-19 are not advised**, in most cases they only serve to spread the virus. The [World Health Organization](#) and [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) advises handwashing/sanitizing offers superior protection. Hence why gloves to protect against other hazards and/or ensure safety of food in processing must be cleaned or changed regularly.

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. Face shields or secure goggles are also a good supplement (but never a substitute) to face masks, especially in situations where physical distancing and other types of barriers are difficult. 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). Public health authorities warn though, 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**, including enhanced ventilation, physical distancing, thorough cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and frequent hand hygiene.

**NOTE:** Any mask designed with an exhale valve should not be used to protect against COVID-19, as the valve has the potential to emit the virus if present. If using an industrial N95 mask designed with an exhale valve to protect against a hazard other than COVID-19, then wear another mask over it.



## TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Beyond taking all reasonable precautions to protect workers from hazards, including the COVID-19 virus, employers also have a general requirement to provide information, instruction, **competent supervision**. Keeping workers, their representatives, supervisors, suppliers, contractors and others who enter the work premises informed about the most current COVID-19 information, including precautionary measures is critical.

In addition to publicly displayed information outlining proper hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette as mentioned above, consider posting at the workplace, sharing electronically and announcing over public address systems, protocols for cleaning and disinfecting, plus physical distancing and screening measures. Consider use of posters with infographics to ensure understanding by all. This said, training, and not just the sharing of information, is a key way employers meet this legal obligation. WHSC **COVID-19 Training**, offered through WHSC virtual classrooms, can assist workplaces seeking to achieve compliance.

Employers must also ensure **workers required to use PPE are trained** in its proper use, care and limitations. Further still, most workers must be **properly trained in Globally Harmonized WHMIS**. With new cleaning and disinfecting products being introduced during the pandemic, the need for this training is greater than ever. WHMIS 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 WHSC **WHMIS Resources** for details.

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](http://www.whsc.on.ca).

Contact a **WHSC Training Services Representative** directly, or reach out to us at [contactus@whsc.on.ca](mailto:contactus@whsc.on.ca) or **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](http://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](#).