



GLOVES at work

Safeguards for workers confronting COVID-19?

(Non-health care workplaces)

Working during the COVID-19 pandemic? Concerned about your health and safety? Health and safety law says your employer must take every reasonable precaution to protect you.

Effective workplace hazard controls adopt the **hierarchy of controls**. For most hazards, controls at the source are most effective. When the workplace hazard is biological like COVID-19, and spreads from human-to-human and contaminated surface-to-human contact, control at the source is difficult.

Workplaces of all kinds can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by following public health directives on **social (physical) distancing and proper hygiene practices** (i.e., avoid touching your face, sneeze/cough etiquette, proper hand washing/sanitizing, and cleaning of all surfaces, especially commonly touched ones).

In health care settings single-use (disposed of after every single patient interaction), medical grade gloves are an essential part of personal protective equipment for all interactions with suspected, presumed or confirmed COVID-19 patients.

ADVICE ON THE LIMITATIONS OF GLOVES

In other workplaces deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, this kind of glove protection, in most instances, is not necessary. Outside of health care settings the Public Health Agency of Canada says, "Gloves are only

recommended when workers will be in direct contact with an ill person, or a contaminated object or environment." The World Health Organization (WHO) states categorically though, "Regularly washing your bare hands offers more protection against catching COVID-19 than wearing rubber [nitrile] gloves."¹ (Nitrile gloves are made out of a synthetic **rubber**, and are an ideal alternative when latex allergies are of concern. Nitrile gloves are the superior glove when it comes to puncture resistance. Nitrile gloves are often referred to as "medical grade.")

Gloves can create a false sense of security, and may help spread the virus. This can happen as workers may unintentionally touch something or someone contaminated with the virus with their gloved hand and then touch their face or surfaces others are using with their gloves.

Consequently, it cannot be stressed enough, **gloves are not a replacement for proper and frequent hand hygiene** (i.e., hand washing or hand sanitizer when hand washing facilities are not readily available). Hand hygiene used **in conjunction with proper and frequent cleaning of surfaces plus social distancing** are absolutely essential to protecting workers working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ADVICE ON WHAT WORKS

To this end, wherever possible employers should provide workers, especially those interacting with the public and customers, with ready access to:

- ✓ Handwashing facilities with soap and hand towels
- ✓ An enforced schedule that provides time for frequent and thorough hand washing
- ✓ Disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizers – with a concentration of 60 per cent alcohol
- ✓ Tissues to catch coughs and sneezes
- ✓ Non touch waste disposal receptacles
- ✓ Clean work surfaces, especially commonly touched surfaces and equipment, with Ethanol, at 62-71%, 0.5% hydrogen peroxide or 0.1% sodium hypochlorite (bleach)
- ✓ A two-metre physical distance between coworkers and/or the public they serve (For tips on social distancing see other WHSC fact sheets on safeguarding workers confronting COVID-19).

ADVICE FOR WORKERS WHO MUST WEAR GLOVES TO PROTECT AGAINST OTHER HAZARDS

For workers who already routinely wear reusable gloves to protect against hazardous workplace exposures (i.e., gloves that help protect against cuts and abrasions, extreme cold or heat, chemical cleaning agents, oils and greases, metal and solvents) it is advisable for you to:

- ✓ Store gloves in a dedicated space when not in use for the work tasks
- ✓ Launder them daily (Check with the supplier for care instructions, but most gloves, even leather gloves, can at least be cleaned with soap and water and hung to dry. If gloves are not dry in time for your next shift, consider having a second pair on hand.)

Workers should also have ready access to **posted instructions for proper [glove removal](#)**. And

whenever possible, before putting on and taking off any gloves sanitize, or better yet, **[wash your hands](#)**.

ADVICE FOR WORKERS WHO USE GLOVES DURING COVID-19 AS A LAST RESORT

In some workplaces, frequent hand washing isn't always possible or disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer are in short supply. As a **last resort** single-use (disposed of after every single interaction), latex-free (i.e., nitrile rubber) gloves can be provided and worn by workers who interact with the public and handle items others have handled with or without gloves (i.e., cash, credit/debit cards, groceries, products and parts, packages, tools and equipment, vehicles, phones).

In these **very limited situations** you will need:

- ✓ an adequate supply of single-use gloves, and
- ✓ to remove and safely **dispose of them with every new interaction**.

Do not reuse them. And check gloves to ensure:

- ✓ No pinholes or tears
- ✓ Secure fit around the fingers and palm
- ✓ Cuff fits snugly around the wrist.

These workers too should also have ready access to **posted instructions for proper [glove removal](#)**.

Please note: This last resort measure of single-use gloves, should continue only as long as absolutely necessary.

Again, **gloves are not a replacement for proper and frequent hand hygiene.**

Further questions or concerns?

Review our COVID-19 resources at www.whsc.on.ca, including our document entitled, *Respiratory and Eye Protection at Work, Safeguarding Workers Confronting COVID-19?*

Need more help still? Contact Workers Health & Safety Centre at contactus@whsc.on.ca or 1-888-869-7950.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/WHO/posts/q-is-wearing-rubber-gloves-while-out-in-the-public-effective-in-preventing-the-n/2988790457832984/>

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](#).