

RETAIL WORKERS — GENERAL SECTOR

Confronting COVID-19

WORKING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

Concerned about your health and safety? Through your representative to the joint health and safety committee or worker health and safety rep you have the right to participate in the process of identifying hazards and concerns and recommending protective measures. Meantime, **your employer must take every reasonable precaution to protect you**. But what is reasonable? The precautionary principle should guide all efforts. In other words, the absence of scientific certainty should not prevent prudent actions. Consider the following.

HAND HYGIENE

Proper washing or sanitizing of hands is essential for workers and customers. To assist in meeting these hygiene practices, **workplaces should ensure ready access to:**

- ▶ Handwashing facilities with soap, water and single use disposable hand towels. (Consider disabling electric hand dryers that may spread the transmission of virus.)
- ▶ Enforced schedule that provides time for frequent and thorough hand washing.
- ▶ Hand sanitizers with a concentration of 60 per cent alcohol. (Consider an individual supply for each worker and sanitizing stations throughout store and at entrance.)
- ▶ Tissues to catch coughs and sneezes.
- ▶ Non touch (or open) waste disposal receptacles.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

Evidence suggests the COVID-19 virus may remain on surfaces from hours to days. Thus, proper and **frequent cleaning and disinfecting is critical**.

Workplaces should establish new cleaning and disinfecting protocols including:

- ▶ Cleaning with detergent or soap and water, then disinfecting with a product that is COVID-19 — approved by [Health Canada](#) or the [U.S. EPA](#) or with an active ingredient such as Ethanol, at 62-71%, 0.5% hydrogen peroxide or 0.1% sodium hypochlorite (bleach).
- ▶ Increased frequency of cleaning and disinfecting, particularly for commonly touched surfaces.

- ▶ Cleaning then disinfecting shared resources before and after use (i.e. box cutters, price scanner), although shared resources and workstations should be limited to the greatest degree possible.
- ▶ Cleaning then disinfecting checkout surfaces after each transaction (i.e. conveyor, counter, payment device, touch screens).
- ▶ Cleaning then disinfecting fitting rooms, shopping carts and baskets before and after each use.
- ▶ Establishing protocol for items brought into fitting rooms and not purchased (i.e., clothing set aside for 24 hours before reintroduction for purchase).
- ▶ Declaring all sales final or ensuring safe handling of returned items.
- ▶ Provision of dedicated “cleaning kit” to front-line staff who will perform enhanced cleaning protocol (i.e., mask, gloves, disinfectant wipes or paper towels and product).
- ▶ Remove work clothing and launder and clean and disinfect shoes as soon as possible after work.
- ▶ Cleaning and disinfecting of ventilation systems daily as well. (Also ensure an adequate supply of fresh, clean outdoor air.)

SOCIAL (PHYSICAL) DISTANCING

Maintaining at least two metres between workers, customers and other third parties is critical.

Wherever possible, workplaces should:

- ▶ Restrict worker, customers and third parties who are unwell or returning from international travel from entering the workplace (i.e., posted alerts and screening) and enforce 14 days of self-isolation before workers can return to work.

- ▶ Offer online ordering and contactless delivery and/or curbside pick up.
- ▶ Limit number of customers in store at any one time.
- ▶ Implement floor markings to ensure physical distancing (at checkout and store entry).
- ▶ Manage traffic flow at entry and exit and throughout store with floor markings and ample staff guiding from safe distance.
- ▶ Offer contactless payment options (minimize handling of cash).
- ▶ Erect barriers (i.e., plexiglass) at checkout and other common interface location.
- ▶ Close every other checkout.
- ▶ Ban reusable bags or have customers bag purchases themselves.
- ▶ Establish protocol for suppliers and vendors (i.e., delivery schedule and touchless signature).

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

PPE is not a replacement for other above-mentioned safety measures. In fact, improper use can increase the risk of infection. A prudent response then for employers is to consult with workers and their representatives to identify all reasonable precautions. If PPE is deemed a necessary last resort, **great care must be taken in its selection and use**. Further to this point, [Ontario's Ministry of Labour](#) suggests PPE be provided by employers.

The PPE needs of retail workers (and customers) will vary though [use of a mask or face covering](#) is now recommended by public health as a precaution against source transmission, especially where physical distancing is not possible. To this end, employers might consider making face masks available should customers not have one.

TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Keeping workers, customers and other third parties informed about the most current information about COVID-19 including precautionary measures is critical. Consider posting at entrances, checkouts, washrooms, hand washing/sanitizing stations, lunch rooms and other highly travelled public areas in retail establishments guidance on [proper hand hygiene](#), [proper cough and sneeze etiquette](#), [cleaning and disinfecting](#), [social distancing](#) along with screening protocol for those who should [not be entering](#) retail establishments. Employers might also consider ongoing in-store announcements reminding customers and workers of COVID-19 precautions.

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 virtual classrooms online, can assist workplaces seeking to achieve compliance. Also, be sure to download and share our online library of [COVID-19 resources](#).

FURTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Need more help still? Contact your worker member of the joint health and safety committee, worker representative, union representative if you have one, or Workers Health & Safety Centre at 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.

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](#).