



# Screening, Testing and Reporting Obligations

## Confronting COVID-19

As with any workplace hazard the first step towards prevention begins by identifying it. And as with any workplace hazard, employers have the most significant obligations in this regard.

### WORKPLACE SCREENING

Employers are required by regulation to implement a [screening process](#) for workers coming to work, along with essential visitors, prior to arrival or when they first enter the workplace. This process does not include patrons entering the workplace, emergency services or other first responders. The Ontario government has established minimum screening requirements. The [screening questions](#) though can be adapted based on the needs of the workplace. Anyone who fails screening should be denied further entry to the workplace. Similarly, those who later begin experiencing COVID-19 symptoms once at work should be sent home. (See screening questions for COVID-19 related symptoms.) In both instances, workers should be advised to:

- ◆ Self-isolate and [book a test](#) or
- ◆ Call their primary care provider or
- ◆ Call Telehealth (1.866.797.0000).

### COVID-19 TESTING

In addition to those experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, you can book an appointment at an assessment centre if you aren't experiencing symptoms, but:

- ◆ You have been exposed to a confirmed case as informed by your public health unit or the COVID Alert app, or
- ◆ You live or work in a setting that has a COVID-19 outbreak, as identified by your local public health unit, or
- ◆ You live or work in an at-risk setting, such as long-term care home, homeless shelter, group home or the like.



**Please note:** Walk in testing was discontinued, as of Tuesday, October 6, 2020.

You can also book an appointment to be tested at an assessment centre or select pharmacies if you are not showing symptoms and are eligible for testing as part of a targeted testing initiative as determined by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care or Public Health Ontario, including:

- ◆ Residents, workers or visitors of long-term care homes
- ◆ Residents or workers in homeless shelters, group homes or other like settings
- ◆ International students that have passed their 14-day quarantine period
- ◆ Farm workers, and
- ◆ Indigenous communities.

If you think you've been exposed to a person with a presumed or confirmed case of COVID-19, but the above criteria do not apply to you, speak with your health care provider.

The Ontario government and public health units suggest calling 911 or going to a hospital emergency room only if you are having difficulty breathing or experiencing other severe [COVID-19 related symptoms](#).



## **ACTING ON TEST RESULTS**

If test results are positive, the local public health unit will:

- ◆ Contact the individual and advise them to [self-isolate](#) until symptoms improve for 24 hours and for at least 10 days after symptoms started, or 20 days if illness is severe or person is severely immune-compromised (If persons with a positive test aren't experiencing symptoms they will be advised to self-isolate for 10 days following the test date.)
- ◆ Perform an investigation and contact tracing
- ◆ Contact the employer if the person was at work while infectious for additional information including assistance with tracing
- ◆ Provide guidance to the employer about measures to reduce risk of transmission including 14-day self isolation for those working "closely" with the infected person
- ◆ Work with the employer to communicate with workforce and public if required.



Public health must respect the privacy of the individual affected and will only disclose their identity to the employer if necessary to address the potential hazard to others.

If test results are negative, public health advises:

- ◆ If you have had contact with a confirmed case, continue self-isolating for the remainder of the required 14 days whether experiencing symptoms or not. If you have symptoms and they persist or worsen, contact your doctor or public health so that re-testing can be considered
- ◆ If you have not had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, tested negative and have no symptoms resume work
- ◆ If your test comes back negative, but you begin to develop COVID-19 symptoms, even if they're mild, book an appointment at an assessment centre as you need to be re-tested.

## ASYMPTOMATIC TRANSMISSION

Although Ontario testing criteria has narrowed, broader testing is prudent considering asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic spreaders play a significant role in transmission. According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease expert in the United States, "Evidence shows that 25 to 45 per cent of infected people likely don't have symptoms. And we know from epidemiological studies they can transmit to someone who is uninfected even when they're without symptoms." (Certainly, there are documented cases in Ontario of persons with no symptoms who have spread the virus in dramatic fashion.)



Consequently, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have observed, "Asymptomatic transmission enhances the need to scale up the capacity for widespread testing and thorough contact tracing to detect asymptomatic infections, interrupt undetected transmission chains, and further bend the curve downward."

## EMPLOYER REPORTING DUTIES

If an employer has not been contacted by public health and learns of a confirmed or even presumed or suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace they should contact the [local public health unit](#) to seek advice in terms of transmission prevention measures or help with contact tracing. In any case, the Ministry of Labour recommends they perform a [workplace assessment](#) to determine what areas of the workplace might be infected and who else may have been in close contact.

Based on this assessment and guidance from public health, the employer may need to:

- ◆ Inform co-workers who were in close contact and have them [self monitor](#) or self-isolate for 14 days (If they begin to

experience symptoms follow assessment/testing protocol mentioned above and also report to employer.)

- ◆ Shut down the workplace or portion of the workplace to thoroughly clean and disinfect, and
- ◆ Implement other measures based on the advice of public health officials.

Employers are required to protect the privacy of the worker affected.

If an employer is advised a worker has an illness, including COVID-19, due to an exposure at the workplace or a claim has been filed with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), the employer **must notify**, within four days, the:

- ◆ Ministry of Labour
- ◆ workplace joint health and safety committee or worker health and safety rep, and
- ◆ trade union, if any.

In the health care sector, illness outbreaks must be monitored and reported to the Public Health Unit as required by the Health Protection and Promotion Act. Outbreaks in long-term care homes

must be reported to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Within three days of learning a worker has COVID-19, the employer must report it to the **Workplace Safety and Insurance Board** (WSIB). Even if an employer is unsure if the COVID-19 case was the result of workplace transmission, the WSIB advises reporting.

## WORKER REPORTING DUTIES

As per public health directives, workers experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or who test positive should not go to work and should **report their illness-related absence to their supervisor or employer.**

Those testing positive should **file a claim with the WSIB.**

If a worker believes they were exposed to the COVID-19 virus at work but are not exhibiting symptoms they can **file a WSIB exposure incident form** (**construction workers** file using a sector specific form). This is a good way to document the exposure should it lead to a confirmed case of COVID-19. In fact, employers who become aware of potential exposure incidents are also encouraged to **file similar exposure incident forms.**

## Further questions or concerns?

Review additional WHSC **COVID-19 resources** at [www.whsc.on.ca](http://www.whsc.on.ca). Register for our **COVID-19 training program** now available in online virtual classrooms.

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](mailto:contactus@whsc.on.ca) or 1-888-869-7950.