

COVID-19: What you need to know about Health and Safety and Working On-Site

Introduction

This document is a collection of resources, best practices and information links designed to help construction employers understand their rights and responsibilities while operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not a legal document and all employers are advised to seek legal advice as part of their overall due diligence process.

While the situation is changing daily, the legislation and regulations used to govern Ontario's workplaces has not. *Employers still have the duty to keep workers and work sites safe and free of hazards and workers still have the right to refuse unsafe work.* Effective communication of new safety procedures and policies will help ensure positive outcomes.

In order to address COVID-19 concerns find below the following resources:

1. COVID-19 Government Announcements
2. On-Site Best Practices
3. Additional Safety Resources and Guides
4. Other Resources

1. Covid-19 Government Announcements:

All levels of government are issuing announcements daily. To stay updated please use the following official links:

- <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus> (Ontario COVID-19 webpage)
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html> (Canada COVID-19 webpage)
- <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/> (Public Health Ontario)

2. On-Site Best Practices

The health and safety of workers is a top concern and increased focus on health and safety is required to keep job-sites open. Below are resources, tips, and best practices employers should follow during the COVID-19 situation:

- a) **Personal Hygiene:** Everyone can take individual steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Personal hygiene tips include:
 - a. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
 - b. Cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue and wash your hands afterwards
 - c. Avoid commonly touched areas including handrails, public transit poles,

- d. Open doors and touch elevator buttons with gloves, the back of your hand, or other body part
 - e. Wash your clothes as soon as you get home
 - f. Notify your supervisor immediately if you are sick and contact public health.
- b) **Illness Reporting:** The symptoms of COVID-19 are shared with many other illnesses including the cold and flus. At this time, it is recommended that any worker who is experiencing any symptoms should be sent home. In addition, Employer should advise all workers experiencing symptoms to contact public health. Public Health is the leading authority for all issues related to COVID-19 and only they can provide detailed instructions to employees and employers. **PLEASE NOTE** additional resources, policies, and procedures are being developed to provide additional support in this area.
- c) **Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development Requirements:** As announced on March 16th, <https://bit.ly/2UiptqI> The MOL is focused on enhancing protections of workers by expanding protected leaves and improving access to EI benefits. In addition, Employer must report occupation illnesses including COVID-19 to:
- a. to the Ministry (in writing) within four (4) days
 - b. to the joint health and safety representative
 - c. to a trade union (if applicable)
- d) **Communicate:** Communication is key, and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities will be key. Everyone will need ensure health and safety policies are updated and posted for all employees to see. Use industry resources including those produced by the IHSA will improve on site understanding.
- e) **Policies:** All employees need to have COVID-19 policies that are posted and communicated with to all employees and contractors/trades. This includes how the site will operate including but not limited to the sanitization of sites, how employees and contractors report illnesses, how to ensure social distancing, and how work will be scheduled.
- f) **Social Distancing:** As outlined in several government announcements Social Distancing is required to control the spread of COVID-19. In order to ensure social distancing on site, Employers should consider the following:
- a. Staggered Start times
 - b. Staggered breaks
 - c. Staggered lunches
 - d. Total number of people on-site and where they are assigned to work
 - e. Site movement (potential pinch points including hoists and site trailers)

- g) **On-site Sanitation:** As outlined in several government documents, on-site sanitation is paramount. All employers have an obligation to increase the sanitization of sites. Areas of focus should include:
- a. Access to soap and water (ways to properly sanitize hands)
 - b. Washroom facilities
 - c. Commonly touched surfaces or areas (hoists / site-trailers / door handles/ equipment or residential units)
 - d. Limit unnecessary on-site contact between workers and between workers and outside service providers. (i.e.: remove coffee trucks from site)
- h) **Adjust On-Site and Production Schedules:** In order to keep sites open, production schedules will need to change as impacts of social distancing will impact productivity. Owners and trades will need to collaborate to ensure there is a clear understanding of how production will be impacted. Schedules should consider:
- a. Need for social distancing including staggered work schedules
 - b. Sanitation of Sites and workspaces
 - c. Reduction of workers (i.e.: in low-rise do not schedule multiple crews in the same unit)
 - d. Work-site mobility and transportation including hoist operations
- i) **Track and Monitor your workforce.** Do the latency period of COVID-19, it is important to track when workers report an illness as well as where they have worked. In the case of a positive test, Public Health will ask Employers to provide information on where an Employee worked as well as the contact information of anyone who may have been exposed. The better employers track information, the better Public Health can respond.

3. Additional Safety Resources and Guidelines

[Public Health Ontario](#) – is the leading provincial authority for the most up-to-date resources on COVID19, including:

- links to linked to evolving public health guidelines, position statements, and situational updates;
- synopsis of key articles updating on the latest findings related to the virus;
- recommendations for use of personal protective equipment;
- testing information; and,
- other public resources.

[Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care](#) - is providing consistent updates on the provincial government response to the outbreak, including:

- status of cases in Ontario;

- current affected areas;
- symptoms and treatments;
- how to protect yourself and self-isolate; and,
- updated Ontario news on the virus.

[Health Canada](#) – outlines the actions being taken by the Government of Canada, as well as what is happening in provinces and communities across the country related to the virus. It also maintains a live-update of the number of confirmed cases and probable cases by province.

[World Health Organization](#) – is updating on the latest guidance and information related to the global outbreak and spread beyond Canadian borders. It also is providing the most up-to-date information on:

- current research and development around the virus;
- a COVID19 situation “dashboard”
- emergency preparedness measures; and,
- live media updates on the spread of the virus.

[IHSA](#) – is an excellent source of Health and Safety information and tools including the following COVID -19 Safety Talk https://www.ihsa.ca/pdfs/safety_talks/covid-19.pdf

4. Other Resources

There are a host of additional resources available to help address the ongoing COVID19 outbreak that are aimed at the construction and design industries. Resources include:

- Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development’s dedicated COVID19 website: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus>
- The Canadian Construction Association’s online *Pandemic Preparedness Guide*: <https://www.cca-acc.com/covid-19-resources/>
- IHSA COVID19 Safety talk: https://www.ihsa.ca/pdfs/safety_talks/covid-19.pdf
- The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention’s *Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers* online resource: <https://bit.ly/2UfRgI9>
- The Harvard Business Review’s Employer Preparedness Questions: <https://bit.ly/2x2OoGS>