

COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses

Employers & Employees

April 27th, 2020

This document provides an overview of COVID-19; what it is, how it is spread, what employers and employees can do to prevent transmission and what to do if an employee becomes ill or tests positive for COVID-19.

What is CoVid-19?

COVID-19 is an illness caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. **COVID-19 often presents with symptoms similar to the common cold or flu.** The most common symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle Aches
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Runny nose¹

There is evidence to suggest that some (including children) may also experience diarrhea and vomiting², while some people infected with COVID-19 may have mild or no symptoms. It may take up to 14 days following an exposure for symptoms to appear. In very serious cases of COVID-19, the infection can cause pneumonia, and in some cases may require hospitalization, ventilation and/or cause death.³

How is it spread?

COVID-19 has been identified as a virus that **is transmitted through droplets.** Exposure can occur through 1) direct contact with droplets of someone infected with the virus (cough, sneeze or other direct close contact), 2) contact with surfaces where droplets from a cough or sneeze of someone infected have landed. For infection to occur, the droplets must come into direct contact with the mucosal membranes of the nose, mouth or eyes. There is evidence to show that COVID-19 can be spread by people who are both symptomatic and asymptomatic (no symptoms), which makes general prevention efforts even more important.^{3,4}

What does this mean for businesses?

As of March 17th, 2020, Ontario declared a state of emergency and on March 24th non-essential services were mandated to stop regular operations.^{5,6} Following advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, on April 3rd, further changes were made to the [list of essential businesses](#) and only those businesses that have been listed as essential may continue to remain open and provide service.⁷ If your business will remain open during the outbreak, it is important for preventative measures to be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure. Note: These guidelines will also be useful as businesses begin to re-open upon government direction.

Recommendations to reduce the spread of COVID-19

Recommendations for Employers

Businesses are expected to continue to put the safety and wellness of their employees top of mind, and in alignment with all [labour laws](#), including the [Employment Standards Amendment Act \(Infectious Diseases\), 2020](#).⁸ There are some specific things that employers can do to make their workplaces safer during this COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) recommends that **businesses make operational changes where possible** to reduce the risk of disease transmission, such as allowing employees to work from home if possible, making changes to delivery and pick-up services only, and staggering schedules.
2. **Increase the frequency of disinfection** of high touch surfaces such as door handles/knobs, counters, keyboards, bathrooms and eating spaces. Health Canada provides a [list of approved disinfectants](#) for use against SARS-CoV-2. Using a Health Canada approved disinfectant with a DIN number will ensure that cleaning practices are effectively removing the virus from surfaces.⁹
3. **Adapt workspaces to allow for 2-metres (6 feet) of physical distancing** where possible between employees and clients. Consider sharing and/or posting [Social Distancing Guidelines at Work](#).
4. **Reduce all unnecessary contact with clients and suppliers.** Provide curbside drop off or pick up where possible to reduce contact. If clients must enter the physical business, ensure physical distancing is maintained and limit the number of customers in the business at one time. Stickers or tape may be used to delineate physical space in lines, such as for cash registers.

5. **Cancel or postpone all non-essential work travel.** If travel is deemed essential, employees should [self-monitor](#) for 14-days following within Canada travel and must [self-isolate](#) for 14-days following any travel outside of Canada. Discuss with employees what is considered essential within your workplace and what can be postponed or cancelled.¹⁰
6. **Minimize all ride sharing.** For businesses that use ride sharing for employees, consider reducing the number of employees per vehicle if the business has additional vehicles that could be of use. Alternatively, consider providing mileage or other mutually agreed-upon terms for employees to use their own transportation. At minimum, if multiple employees will be in one vehicle, ensure that employees are provided with face masks for use while in the vehicle to best protect one another while unable to physically distance. Vehicles should be stocked with hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes and be disinfected regularly. For additional tips on how to stay safe while using shared transportation, see [Recommendations for Preventing COVID-19 in Taxis and ride-sharing vehicles](#).
7. **Create ‘sanitation stations’ within the workplace.** For businesses that still have client contact, a sanitation station should be created at the entrance of the business. Additional stations should be set up at the cash register for use after handling cash, and soap and disposable paper towels should be provided in the bathroom and/or kitchen. The [Bank of Canada](#) highlights the importance of continued acceptance of cash and how to safely handle. Adequate supplies of sanitizer and soap at wash stations should be ensured. Consider posting [safe handwashing](#) or [hand sanitizing](#) posters at sanitation stations.
8. **Encourage respiratory hygiene** by sharing information about correct [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), including how to cough or sneeze into your sleeve to prevent spreading of droplets within the workplace.
9. **Employers should consider reviewing HR policies with respect to sick leaves.** Employers are encouraged to review sick policies, including sick time, if an employee is required to self-isolate due to illness or provide care to a family member. Note that the [Employment Standards Amendment Act \(Infectious Diseases\)](#) outlines the requirements for job-protected leaves resulting from COVID-19. **Employers cannot request medical notes from employees as proof of eligibility for COVID-19 leave.**⁷ COVID-19 policies should be clearly communicated with employees. Contingency plans should be made in the event that staff are ill and required to stay home, including arranging transportation for ill employees (see more on this in ‘What to do if an employee become ill’ section below).

Employers may consider posting [Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace: Employers, Employees and Essential Workers](#). Additional recommendations specific to the nature of the business and employee demographics can be found in [Risk-Informed Decision Making for Workplaces and Businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Recommendations for Employees

All staff have a role to play in reducing the likelihood of transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace. Below are recommendations for maintaining the health and safety of all employees.

1. **Maintain physical distance of 2-metres where possible.** Employers should assist employees to reduce workplace density where possible.
2. **Hands should be sanitized using sanitizer or washed with soap for 20 seconds frequently throughout the day.** If handling cash, hands should be sanitized after each encounter. Hands should be washed after using the bathroom and before consuming food. Also consider frequent sanitizing of personal belongings such as phones or keys after use.
3. **Avoid touching your face.** The virus is most often transferred from hands to the eyes, mouth or nose. Only touch your face after sanitizing or washing hands with soap for 20 seconds.
4. If you have to cough or sneeze, make sure to [use appropriate respiratory hygiene etiquette](#). This includes coughing or sneezing into your sleeve or into a tissue, immediately disposing, and washing your hands or using hand sanitizer.
5. **If close contact with colleagues or members of the public is unavoidable, consider wearing a mask.** Tips for how and when a mask should be used are shared by the [Government of Ontario](#) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).
6. **Avoid ride sharing if possible.** If your employment typically includes ride sharing, alternate transportation should be arranged if possible, including use of additional work vehicles to reduce the number of employees in one vehicle, or using a personal vehicle. If ride sharing cannot be avoided, employees should use masks while in the vehicle and unable to physically distance. Consider having one driver to reduce potential cross-contamination or use disinfecting wipes before switching drivers. Consider keeping windows open to increase airflow.

7. **Avoid all non-essential work travel.** If travel is deemed essential, employees should [self-monitor](#) for 14-days following travel within Canada and must [self-isolate](#) for 14-days following any travel outside of Canada.¹⁰
8. **Stay home if sick** and report illness to employer. If an employee becomes ill, follow the tips in the 'What to do if an employee becomes ill' section.

For more tips on stopping the spread of COVID-19, visit [COVID-19: Stop the Spread](#) on the Ontario government site.

What to do if an employee becomes ill?

We know that community transmission of COVID-19 is now occurring, and that despite a person's best effort to protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19, some staff may still become ill.

- If an employee becomes ill at work, they should be separated from other employees in the workplace immediately until transportation can be arranged to bring the employee home. Public transportation should be avoided (bus, taxi, uber) if possible and private transportation should be arranged.
- Staff should be informed to stay home if they are ill, to take the [COVID-19 self-assessment quiz](#), and follow the direction provided, which may include calling their doctor's office to determine whether a COVID-19 test is recommended.¹¹ If testing is recommended, testing clinic locations can be found on [the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health website](#).¹²
- If the employee is tested for COVID-19, Public Health will be notified and will follow up with the staff to monitor their symptoms and to provide direction for length of isolation period, including the length of time they must wait after symptoms subside.
- Staff should follow the recommendation of Public Health, which may include a 14-day isolation period and additional days following symptoms clearing. Employees should only return to work once they've received verbal clearance from Public Health.
- Staff should communicate with their employer about the required leave from work and their expected return date. Employers must allow employees to complete the full isolation period and allow employees to return once they've received verbal clearance by Public Health. Please note, Public Health is unable to provide letters of clearance to each positive case. Only verbal clearance will be provided to the staff member who tested positive unless further action is required by the employer, in which case Public Health will connect directly with the employer.

What if an employee tests positive?

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public health recognizes that a positive test result for COVID-19 is likely to be a stressful experience for both the employee and the employer.

The steps that WDGPH will take in the event that a positive case is identified are outlined below. Please note that the employer/business will only be contacted if exposure may have occurred at the workplace.

1. The testing lab notifies the responsible public health unit of each positive case of COVID-19.
2. Public Health staff then follow up with the individual who has tested positive to:
 - a. Let the person know they have tested positive and answer any questions they may have.
 - b. Advise them of the need to self-isolate for a specified duration of time.
 - c. Try to determine how they may have been exposed to COVID-19.
 - d. Determine the places they went while they were infectious (e.g. to work or public places) and who their close contacts were. If close contacts are identified, Public Health will contact them and others to assess the risk to others (e.g. their employer).
3. Public Health will follow up with any close contacts to let them know of the situation, to confirm if they were a close contact, and if so, to advise them to immediately self-isolate for 14 days from the last date of exposure to the case. They will also be informed of how to self-monitor for symptoms and what to do if they become ill over the 14-days.

If a person was at work while infectious, Public Health staff will determine if they posed risk in the workplace. **Public Health will only consult with the employer if additional information is required related to the individual to determine close contacts or if any other measures need to be taken by the workplace or employees to reduce the risk of transmission.**

It is important to note that Public Health:

- Is required by law to respect the privacy of the person infected
- Will only disclose a positive case to an employer if it is needed to manage the exposure risk to others.

If the employer is contacted regarding a positive case, the employer may wish to inform staff or clients about the positive case. Employers are encouraged to maintain privacy of the employee where possible. A sample memo is provided below that may be used for this purpose. (Adapted with permission from Peel Public Health).

How can we stay informed about CoVid-19?

Updates on provincial cases of CoVid-19 are posted daily at www.ontario.ca, while information on local cases, testing locations and local news can be found at Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health.

Additional Resources

Additional resources can be found in the Appendices, including hand washing/sanitizing posters, tips for social distancing at work and a sample letter to staff and clients in the event of a positive case.

References

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2. Centre for Disease Control, COVID-19 and Children. [Accessed: April 20, 2022]. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#COVID-19-and-Children>
3. Government of Canada, Coronavirus (COVID-19): Symptoms and Treatment [Accessed: April 20, 2020], Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms.html?topic=tilelink>.
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6. Government of Ontario, Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act: Closure of Places of Non-Essential Business. [Accessed: April 20, 2020]. Available at: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/r20082>
7. Government of Ontario, Ontario Extends Business Closures to Stop the Spread of COVID-19. Available at: <https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2020/04/ontario-extends-business-closures-to-stop-the-spread-of-covid-19.html>
8. Government of Ontario, Your Guide to the *Employment Standards Act* [Accessed: April 22, 2020]. Available at: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0>.
9. Health Canada, Hard Surface Disinfectants and Hand Sanitizers (COVID-19): List of Hard Surface Disinfectants. [Accessed: April 20, 2020]. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.
10. Government of Canada, Coronavirus (COVID-19): Travel Restrictions and Exceptions. [Accessed: April 23, 2020]. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html>.
11. Government of Ontario, Co-Vid-19 Self-Assessment. [Accessed April 20, 2020]. Available at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>.
12. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, COVID-19 Information for the Public. [Accessed: April 20, 2020]. Available at: <https://www.wdgppublichealth.ca/your-health/covid-19-information-public/status-cases-wdg>.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample memo notifying employees and/or the public of a positive case in the workplace:

An Important Update

The COVID-19 situation is evolving. Today we were notified that one of our staff has been confirmed with having the COVID-19 virus. The employee last worked on <insert date>.

At this time, the employee is resting at home in self isolation <insert description of how they are doing>.

We will continue to be honest with you, our employees, customers and community. Every effort will be taken.

We are taking all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of all employees and clients and are working closely with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health to assist them with their investigation. They have stated <insert WDGPH health risk language here- to be provided by Public Health>.

We do know that COVID-19 is now in our community, so again we encourage everyone to take precautions and wash your hands and practice physical distancing when you do have to go out.

We're here for you during these difficult times.

BUSINESS <Insert description of business type> HOURS HAVE BEEN IMPACTED<list hours>

Thank you, OWNER

*Adapted with permission from Peel Public Health

Appendix 2: Additional Resources

Poster: [Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace: Employers, Employees and Essential Workers](#)

Poster: [Hand Sanitizing](#)

Poster: [Hand Washing](#)

Poster: [Social Distancing Guidelines at Work](#)