

Confronting COVID-19

Safer commuting during COVID-19

Thursday , June 4, 2020, 11:00 am

Webinar objectives

- common means of commuting pre-COVID-19
- employer's duty to protect worker health and safety
- employer policies to reduce commuting
- different means to commute during COVID-19
- health risks associated with public transit use
- measures by public transit companies to protect commuters
- protecting worker health upon arrival at workplace

Commuting pre-COVID-19



Employer's duty

Employer has a duty to “take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker” [OHSA, 25(2)(h)].

What is reasonable in the circumstances? Is it:

- permitting workers to work remotely where they can
- allowing certain tasks to be completed at home
- reducing commuter pressure for those that cannot work from home.

The JHSC and worker representatives should play a role.

Employer policies to reduce commutes

- work arrangements to reduce commutes growing in popularity
- options JHSC and representatives could discuss include:
 - compressed work weeks
 - flexible work hours
 - working from home
 - work in office half the week
 - staggered start and end times



Getting to work during COVID-19

- different means to commute to work during pandemic
- focus on reducing exposure and transmission of COVID-19
- minimize contact when travelling as much as possible



Driving to work

- for many, driving remains the only option to get to work
 - drive alone in your own car if possible
- if using a work vehicle, JHSC can encourage employer to
 - disinfect vehicle thoroughly and regularly
 - wash hands before and after journey
- if sharing a ride outside household
 - roll down windows to increase ventilation
 - wear masks



Cycling to work



- many cities have bike lanes for leisure and commuting to work
- in some Toronto neighbourhoods 20 per cent cycle to work or school
- cycling in single file allows easy physical distancing and less likelihood to contract virus as outside

Walking to work

- few workers have option to walk entire commute
- but many walk part even if to bus or train
- walking in single file allows physical distancing and as outside less likely to need face mask



Taking transit to work

- large percentage of population in cities commutes by transit
- mass transit use (streetcar, bus or train) has increased in last decade
- transit infrastructure expanding to east, west and north of GTA



Health issues on public transit

- virus can spread from contact surfaces, droplet transmission
- time of exposure and air quality/ventilation are issues
- risk higher in underground systems than above ground
- risk heightened when changing between different modes (bus to subway)
- physical distancing and reducing contact with surfaces can be difficult

Measures by transit companies

- mass transit use in GTA declined 80 per cent since March 2020
- but continued use of mass transit by essential workers during pandemic required transit companies to implement protective measures quickly
- transit authorities across province made major changes to routes, stations and vehicles

Changes to routes

Changes to routes designed to lower rider capacity and ensure physical distancing was maintained. These included:

- redeploying articulated buses to high volume routes
- increasing buses during early morning commute
- operating on a holiday or weekend schedule.



Changes in stations

Some of the more common changes at stations included:

- rerouting foot traffic to reduce crowding
- installation of signage to remind commuters to physically distance
- installation of hand sanitizers at station entrances.

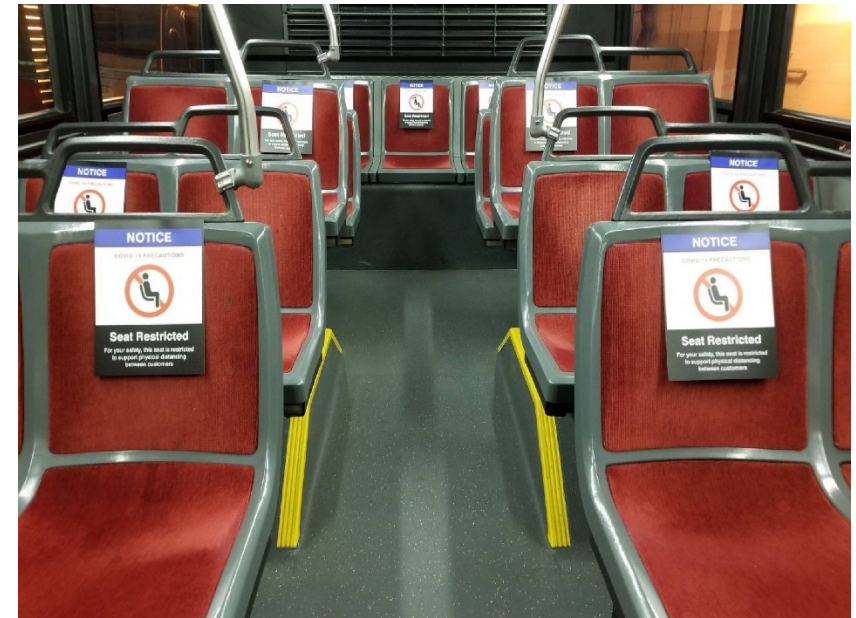


Changes on vehicles

Changes on vehicles were the most significant and included:

- enhanced cleaning and disinfection of hard and soft surfaces
- installation of plexiglass barriers at driver's seat
- cordoning off seats to ensure physical distancing of passengers
- boarding of passengers at back rather than front door
- installation of hand sanitizer dispensers at back door.

Changes on vehicles



Differences across systems

But there are differences across transit authorities in the province.
For example:

- masks are required by passengers riding system in Ottawa but only recommended by Toronto Transit Commission
- larger transit systems disinfect hard surfaces and apply antimicrobial fogging to all vehicles daily whereas smaller authorities focus on sanitizing touch and grab points

Differences across systems



Transit practices outside Canada

Much can be learned from transit companies across the world whose systems have been fully operational for several weeks. Examples include:

- crews that clean and disinfect vehicles five times a day in South Korea
- a reservation system accessible by mobile phone in The Netherlands
- maximum capacity limits on subway trains enforced in New York City.

Considerations for transit use

If you can:

- travel at off peak times
- allow extra time for commuting
- reduce number of vehicle changes
- physically distance on transit and platforms
- stand or sit near a door or window
- wear a mask and gloves
- sanitize hands before and after



Arriving at work - elevators

Journey to work doesn't end with the commute. JHSCs and worker representatives can encourage employers to have property management companies:

- install hand sanitizer dispensers
- disinfect elevator key pads regularly
- post capacity limits for elevators.



Arriving at work – change rooms

Similar measures should be established for change rooms or lockers. Employers can:

- post limits on room capacity
- stagger work start and end to reduce pressure
- clean and disinfect high-touch areas
- block off every other locker, if possible

Again, JHSC and worker representatives can play a role.



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