

# PUBLIC TRANSIT WORKERS

## CONFRONTING COVID-19

Updated December 2020



Working during the COVID-19 pandemic?  
Concerned about your health and safety?



## TRAINING

► THE RIGHT THING. THE RIGHT WAY.

Health and safety law says **your employer must take every reasonable precaution to protect you.**

But what is reasonable in the circumstances and follows Public Health directives? The precautionary principle, should guide all actions. In other words, the absence of scientific certainty should not prevent prudent actions. Consider the following.

## HYGIENE AND CLEANING

Hygiene is essential. Hygiene notices (i.e., avoid touching your face, sneeze/cough etiquette and proper hand washing) should be posted in terminals, trains, buses and other vehicles, maintenance facilities, washrooms, hand washing stations and lunch rooms.

**Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting** is also a must considering health and research authorities agree the COVID-19 virus can survive on surfaces for hours and even days depending on the surface (Generally, the harder the surface, the longer it lasts). Disinfecting should take place between shifts and at other times as deemed necessary (at least twice daily).

[Health Canada](#) and the [U.S. EPA](#) offer lists of acceptable disinfectant products for use against the COVID-19 virus. However, wherever possible, consider using safer cleaning and disinfecting solutions whose active ingredients include ethanol, isopropanol (isopropyl alcohol), hydrogen peroxide, L-Lactic acid, or citric acid.

**Enhanced ventilation**, filtration and maintenance is equally important. The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) even provides [guidance for vehicles](#). Some transit systems are exploring [promising technologies](#) for their vehicles.

### You should also have ready access to:

- ▶ Hand washing facilities with hot water, soap and single-use hand towels
- ▶ Time for frequent and thorough hand washing
- ▶ Hand sanitizer containing at least 60 per cent alcohol for use when hand washing facilities are not accessible ([Health Canada](#) offers a list of recalled hand sanitizing products you should not use.)
- ▶ Tissues to catch coughs and sneezes
- ▶ Non touch (or open) waste disposal receptacles (plus adequate waste disposal at shift change)
- ▶ Single-use disinfecting wipes or disinfectant products and paper towels for use during work shifts on commonly touched surfaces and equipment (i.e. steering wheel and operation panels) (Be sure to wash or sanitize hands too following disinfecting surfaces.)
- ▶ Clean work wear (This includes hand, eye and other protection normally used to protect against work hazards other than COVID-19. Clean/laundry as soon as possible after use. Launder in accordance with manufacturer's instruction, using the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items completely.)



## SOCIAL (PHYSICAL) DISTANCING

Self-isolation for those with COVID-19, those experiencing symptoms and those who were exposed to a presumed or confirmed case is essential. In fact, for workers or suppliers coming to work, employers are required to implement a [screening process](#) prior to arrival or when they first enter the workplace. **Should anyone fail the screening, they should be denied entry and advised to self-isolate**, call their health care provider or Telehealth Ontario (1.866.797.0000) for additional guidance on whether or not they require a COVID-19 test.

Employers should also dedicate a location to isolate people who become ill at work until they can leave. (Surgical masks should be provided to these workers to help catch potentially infected droplets.)

For information on when workers are cleared to reenter the workforce, consult the Ontario's Ministry of Health [guidance document](#).

**NOTE:** Employers must report (in writing and within four days) all known, work-related, positive test results for COVID-19 to the Ministry of Labour, the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative, and trade union (if applicable).

Through posters or announcements in terminals, shelters and vehicles, passengers should also be reminded not to use public transit if they are unwell or returning within the past 14 days from international travel.

**Ensuring at least two metres distance** between operators, other workers and passengers is also critical. To achieve this, employers should:

- ▶ Limit passenger capacity on public transit (i.e., increase vehicles for peak routes and hours)
- ▶ Reduce number of workers in the workplace at any one time (i.e., cease non-essential work, stagger/ shorten work hours)
- ▶ Consider contactless payment options (i.e., virtual, tap cards)
- ▶ Cordon off sufficient number of rider seats behind vehicle operators to ensure distance
- ▶ Enclose the area around operator where possible
- ▶ Implement clear markings on floors spelling out physical distancing requirements
- ▶ Establish transit entry and exit patterns where possible to limit close contact between operator and passengers
- ▶ Employ staff to manage distance and line ups, but ensure staff maintains their distance too.



## PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

In health care settings, personal protective equipment (PPE) is essential for all interactions with suspected, presumed or confirmed COVID-19 patients. In other workplaces and public spaces, the same level of PPE may not be necessary to protect against COVID-19 virus. **Before using PPE**, employers should first work with joint health and safety committees, worker health and safety representatives (and union reps where applicable) to examine all the ways in which workers may be exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Then consider the precautions promoted by public health authorities, including those mentioned above, and how best to implement them.

Remember when PPE is deemed necessary, **great care must be taken** in its selection, use, cleaning, laundering and disposal. Also keep in mind, some PPE can cause a false sense of security, offers limited protection and can also increase the risk of infection if used improperly. For instance, for most workers, gloves to protect against COVID-19 are not advised, in most cases they only serve to spread the virus. Hand washing/sanitizing offers superior protection.

In terms of **non-medical masks and face coverings**, the position taken by public health authorities has evolved significantly, especially in non-health care work settings. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), for instance, now recognizes cloth masks as both a source control blocking the release of exhaled respiratory droplets and aerosols and as personal protection for the mask wearer. They added however the level of mask protection is dependent on design, fit and materials used. See the **WHSC COVID-19: [Respiratory and Eye Protection](#)** resource document for details.

Here in Ontario, the universal use of masks or face coverings that cover the nose, mouth and chin is now mandatory in all indoor public spaces, including workplaces (even those not open to the public) and on public transit.

In addition to masks, also mandatory in Ontario is PPE (i.e., **goggles or face shields**) to protect the eyes of service workers, including transit workers, if they come within two metres of another person who is not wearing a mask or face covering during any period when they are indoors, or where they are not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier (See Regulations 263/20 and 264/20.).

Public health authorities warn though, non-medical masks, nor PPE alone will prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and must be used as part of a **wide range of controls**, including enhanced ventilation, physical distancing, thorough cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and frequent hand hygiene.



## TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Keeping workers, their representatives, supervisors, passengers and others informed about the most current information about COVID-19 including precautionary measures is critical. In addition to publicly displayed information outlining proper hand hygiene and proper cough and sneeze etiquette as mentioned above, consider posting at the workplace, in the various modes of public transit and within terminals, and share electronically, cleaning and disinfecting protocols plus physical distancing and screening measures.

Employers also have a general requirement to provide information, instruction, [competent supervision](#), and take all reasonable precautions to protect workers from hazards, including the COVID-19 virus. Training, and not just the sharing of information, is a key way employers meet this legal obligation. WHSC [COVID-19 Training](#), offered through WHSC virtual classrooms, can assist workplaces seeking to achieve compliance.

Employers must also ensure workers required to use PPE are trained in its proper use, care and limitations. Further still, most workers, including those employed in various capacities in public transit operations, must be properly trained in Globally Harmonized WHMIS. This training must result in the workers being able to use information required by WHMIS to protect their health and safety [s. 7(3), WHMIS Reg.]. This training must be developed and implemented in consultation with the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative. See Workers Health & Safety Centre [WHMIS Resources](#) for details.

Properly trained, [certified JHSC members](#) are also mandatory and critical to securing safer, healthier workplaces.



### FURTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Review our other COVID-19 resources at [www.whsc.on.ca](http://www.whsc.on.ca).

Contact a [WHSC Training Services Representative](#) directly, or reach out to us at [contactus@whsc.on.ca](mailto: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](http://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](#).