

PUBLIC TRANSIT WORKERS

Confronting COVID-19

Working during the COVID-19 pandemic? Concerned about your health and safety? 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, maintenance facilities, vehicles, washrooms, hand washing stations and lunch rooms. You should also have ready access to:

- ▶ Handwashing facilities with soap and hand towels
- ▶ Time for frequent and thorough hand washing
- ▶ Disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizers – with 60 per cent alcohol – especially for operators who may not have ready access to handwashing facilities
- ▶ Tissues to catch coughs and sneezes
- ▶ Non touch (or open) waste disposal receptacles (plus adequate waste disposal for operators at shift change)
- ▶ Clean work environments, including HVAC systems and commonly touched surfaces and equipment (i.e., washrooms, vehicle handles/poles, steering wheels, operation panels) at least twice daily, and deep cleaning on vehicles between driver shifts, with Ethanol, at 62-71%, 0.5% hydrogen peroxide or 0.1% sodium hypochlorite (bleach)
- ▶ Clean work wear (This includes hand, eye and other protection in maintenance, normally used to protect against work hazards other than COVID-19.) Clean/laundry as soon as possible after use. As an added precaution, workers should change out of their work clothes upon returning home.

SOCIAL (PHYSICAL) DISTANCING

Space between workers (or workers and the public) is critical. Wherever possible, your employer should:

- ▶ Restrict people who are unwell or returning from international travel from entering the workplace (i.e., posted alerts and screening) and enforce 14 days of self-isolation before workers can return to work
- ▶ Post reminders for riders in terminals, vehicle shelters and vehicles they should not be using public transit if they are unwell or returning recently (within the last 14 days) from international travel and use transit only for essential travel
- ▶ Reduce numbers in the workplace and on vehicles (i.e., cease non-essential work; stagger/shorten work

hours; admit fewer riders on vehicles, increase vehicles for peak routes and hours)

- ▶ Maintain a two-metre distance
 - ▷ Cordon off sufficient number of rider seats behind vehicle operators to ensure distance
 - ▷ Rear-door vehicle boarding and exit (except where rider has accessibility issue and needs ramp)
 - ▷ Employ staff to manage distance and line ups, but ensure this staff maintains their distance too.
- ▶ Change policies on fare collection and fare confirmation/enforcement activities (i.e., extend existing monthly passes, suspend acceptance of cash transactions and paper transfers)
- ▶ Isolate people who become ill at work until they can leave.

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 occupations working during the COVID-19 pandemic, this kind of protection against COVID-19, may not be necessary. In transit maintenance areas, workers may wear PPE every day to protect against work hazards other than COVID-19. But no matter where you work in transit, additional PPE such as surgical facemasks and rubber (nitrile) gloves, can cause a false sense of security and offer limited protection against COVID-19. Improper use can also increase the risk of infection.

As such, when it comes to the COVID-19 virus, public health authorities tell us PPE is not a replacement for social distancing, hand hygiene, and clean surfaces. Working with worker reps (and union reps where there is one), employers should first examine all the ways in which workers may be exposed to COVID-19. Then consider hygiene and social distancing measures to combat potential exposures. Above measures are a good place to start. If after exhausting all measures, additional and appropriate PPE is deemed a necessary last resort, great care must be taken in its selection and use.

See **WHSC COVID-19 information sheets on [Gloves at Work](#) and [Respiratory and Eye Protection at Work](#) for additional details.**

FURTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Review our other COVID-19 resources at www.whsc.on.ca. **Need more help still?** Contact Workers Health & Safety Centre at 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.

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](#).