

RESTAURANT, BAR, FOOD AND DRINK 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? 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 at all entrances, washrooms, food preparation work stations, serving stations such as the bar and in menus themselves.

For customers entering the premises **hand sanitizer** should be made available. Employers should consider too assigning staff to entrances, who among other things, encourage customers to use the hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer is effective if it contains at least 60 per cent alcohol. [Health Canada](#) offers a list of recalled hand sanitizing products that should not be used.

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). This is especially important for commonly touched surfaces and equipment (i.e., door handles, washrooms, host stands, service counters). Be sure to wash or sanitize hands too following disinfecting surfaces.

[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.

You should also have ready access to:

- ▶ Hand washing facilities with hot running water, soap and single-use hand towels
- ▶ Time for frequent and thorough hand washing
- ▶ Hand sanitizer when hand washing facilities are not accessible
- ▶ Tissues to catch coughs and sneezes
- ▶ Non touch (or open) waste disposal receptacles (plus adequate waste disposal at shift change)
- ▶ Clean towels and sponges (Use different cloths for food prep areas and front-of-house/customer-accessed areas. In customer areas use separate cleaning cloths for each table, counter or surface area.)
- ▶ Clean work wear, including aprons (Clean/laundry as soon as possible after use. Launder in accordance with manufacturer's instruction, using the hottest appropriate water setting and dry items completely.)
- ▶ Gloves, tongs and other utensils to prevent direct contact with food
- ▶ Hygienic food prep surfaces as per Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance for Food Premises.

NOTE: For establishments that have been in lock down or operating at dramatically reduced capacity, attention to water management systems should also be paid when reopening or ramping up business. **Water systems that have stagnated may lead to the growth of harmful legionella bacteria.** These systems should be assessed, cleaned, disinfected, flushed, and then maintained in order to prevent flu-like illness (Pontiac fever) or more severe pneumonia (Legionnaires' disease). For more information, see the Workers Health & Safety Centre (WHSC) hazard bulletin, [*Legionella: hazards in the mist.*](#)



SOCIAL (PHYSICAL) DISTANCING

Self-isolation for those with COVID-19 or those experiencing symptoms or 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 respiratory droplets.)

For information on when workers are cleared to re-enter 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). Employers in restaurants and bars are also required to collect contact information from at least one person in a party of customers in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak and ensuing necessary contact tracing to contain the outbreak.

Through posters at entrance points customers should also be advised not to enter the premises if they are unwell or returning within the past 14 days from international travel.



Space between workers, or workers and the public they serve, is critical. Your employer should implement the most protective measures possible. **Consider the following:**

- ▶ Reduce worker interaction in the workplace (i.e. stagger shifts, breaks and lunches)
- ▶ Offer outdoor dining and drinking options wherever possible (Ontario government regulations allow outdoor service with the exception of when a lockdown is declared.)
- ▶ Encourage customers to use credit and debit to minimize the handling of cash
- ▶ Offer customers the option to purchase online and use curbside pickup or contactless takeout delivery
- ▶ Minimize service time with patrons (i.e., bus tables after patrons depart)
- ▶ Establish systems to maintain at least a two-metre distance
 - ▷ Mark the floor to communicate this distance
 - ▷ Mark aisles to indicate traffic flow goes in one direction only
 - ▷ Employ staff to manage distances and traffic flow, but ensure this staff maintains their distance too
 - ▷ Erect plexiglass barriers at checkouts and any other locations where interaction occurs, particularly when two metres cannot be maintained
- ▶ Dedicate work stations and equipment for each worker (Shared resources must be cleaned between use.).

Depending on the level of COVID community spread mandatory government restrictions for restaurants and bars in Ontario also include:

- ▶ Reduced indoor capacity
- ▶ Shorter hours of operation
- ▶ Shorter hours when alcohol can be served
- ▶ Tables set at least two metres apart or divided by impermeable barrier like plexiglass
- ▶ Limits to numbers of persons per table
- ▶ Patrons to remain sitting while drinking and dining
- ▶ Closed buffet and self service.

As the pandemic has evolved so has the government framework to help prevent transmission. The current framework also restricts on activities within establishments such as dancing, singing (including karaoke) and the performance of music. **Restrictions are tied to the degree of community spread** — the higher the spread, the tighter the restrictions. For instance, in regions where the weekly incidence rate is 25 to 39.9 per 100,000 persons and the percentage of positive tests is 1.3 to 2.4 per cent establishments are allowed 50 indoor patrons. Once community spread reaches a weekly incidence rate of greater than 40 per 100,000 and greater than 2.5 per cent tests coming back positive, indoor patrons are limited to 10 persons indoors. For details on the framework and measures involved visit the [government website](#), or download this [summary document](#).



ENHANCED VENTILATION

Research confirms **airborne transmission of the COVID-19 virus** often beyond the two metre social distancing rule. At least two studies have established transmission of the virus beyond two metres in restaurant settings, one recently in [Korea](#) and another earlier in [China](#). For this reason, [enhanced ventilation](#), filtration and maintenance is perhaps even more important than social distancing. In response, [public health officials](#) have joined globally-recognized standards setting organizations and [some experts](#) to promote enhanced ventilation aimed at reducing airborne transmission in indoor work environments and public spaces.

The following are just a few examples of enhanced measures:

- ▶ Assess the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system to ensure it is functioning properly using a certified technician (especially prior to reopening after temporary shutdown)
- ▶ Increase ventilation rate and run system longer than normal (24/7 if possible)
- ▶ Use high efficiency filters (minimum value MERV-13 or higher) and ensure they are within service life and installed properly
- ▶ Employ air purification technologies such as high efficiency particulate air (HEPA), activated charcoal, and electrostatic filtration systems, as well as ultraviolet irradiation
- ▶ Ensure relative humidity levels in the workplace are kept between 40 and 60 per cent, if possible
- ▶ Increase amount of clean outdoor air circulating into the system to dilute contaminated air
- ▶ Ensure air from the breathing zone of one person is not flowing directly into the breathing zone of another (This is especially important for workers like hosts, cashiers and bar tenders who remain at one work station throughout their shift.)



PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

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 non-health care workers, nitrile (synthetic rubber) gloves to protect against COVID-19 are not advised, in most cases they only serve to spread the virus. The [World Health Organization](#) and [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) advises 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. The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), for instance, now recognizes these masks as both a source control blocking the release of exhaled respiratory droplets and aerosols and as personal protection for the mask wearer. They add 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 all workplaces (even those not open to the public). The biggest exception to universal masking is for customers of those food and drink establishments allowed to remain open. **Customers are allowed to take off their mask when eating or drinking.** At all other times they must remain masked.

In addition to masks, also mandatory in Ontario is PPE (i.e., **goggles or face shields**) to protect the eyes of service workers, including workers in food and drink establishments, 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 [364/20](#)).

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

Beyond taking all reasonable precautions to protect workers from hazards, including the COVID-19 virus, employers also have a general requirement to provide information, instruction, **competent supervision**. Keeping workers, their representatives, supervisors, customers, suppliers and others informed about the most **current COVID-19 information**, 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, sharing electronically and including in menus, protocols for cleaning and disinfecting, plus physical distancing, mask requirements and screening measures.

This said, 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 must be properly trained in Globally Harmonized WHMIS. With new cleaning and disinfecting products being introduced during the pandemic the need for this training is greater than ever. **WHMIS 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 WHSC **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.

Contact a **WHSC Training Services Representative** directly, or reach out to us 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](#).