

SCREENING, TESTING AND REPORTING OBLIGATIONS



CONFRONTING COVID-19



Updated March 2021

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



TRAINING

▶ THE RIGHT THING. THE RIGHT WAY.

As with any workplace hazard the first step towards prevention begins by identifying it. And as with any workplace hazard, employers have the most significant obligations in this regard.

WORKPLACE COVID SCREENING

Employers are required by regulation to implement a [screening process](#) for workers coming to work, along with essential visitors, prior to arrival or when they first enter the workplace. This particular process does not include patrons entering the workplace, emergency services or other first responders. The Ontario government has established minimum screening requirements. The [screening questions](#) though can be adapted based on the needs of the workplace.

Some workplaces have added rapid testing to their screening regime to further assist with identifying COVID-19 cases. These tests produce results usually within 15 to 30 minutes. [Debate continues regarding their use](#), largely because of the greater potential of false negatives. However, they are seen as an important tool in workplaces where large numbers congregate, such as schools, airports and prisons. While rapid tests are not a substitute to all other precautions that must remain in place regardless of whether someone tests negative, they are a supplement some have used to great effect.

Nonetheless, anyone who fails screening should be denied entry to the workplace. Similarly, those who later begin experiencing [COVID-19 symptoms](#) once at work should be sent home. In both instances, workers should be advised to:

- ▶ inform the employer,
- ▶ go to a [COVID-19 assessment centre](#) or community lab to get tested and follow further direction from public health,
- ▶ stay home and [self-isolate](#) unless going to the assessment centre, and
- ▶ contact Telehealth Ontario at 1.866.797.0000 or your health care provider if you have any further concerns or questions.

Public health also recommends [screening customers](#) before they enter a workplace or business. At a minimum, signage must be [clearly posted](#) at entry points to the workplace or business outlining COVID-19 symptoms and other key screening questions and directives.

COVID-19 TESTING

A person meeting one or more of the following criteria can get a COVID-19 test at an [assessment centre or participating community lab](#):

- ▶ experiencing COVID-19 symptoms
- ▶ have been exposed to a COVID-19 case
- ▶ received a COVID app alert exposure notification (or contact from public health)
- ▶ worker or resident in a setting with a COVID-19 outbreak identified by a local public health unit
- ▶ worker or visitor in a long-term care home
- ▶ worker in a retirement home
- ▶ worker or resident in a homeless shelter, group home, hospice or other like settings
- ▶ farm worker
- ▶ person who identifies as indigenous
- ▶ an international student having passed a 14-day quarantine period, and
- ▶ others identified in the most current [COVID-19 testing guidelines](#).

A person who is **not experiencing symptoms** and meets one or more of the following criteria can get a COVID-19 test at a [participating pharmacy](#):

- ▶ worker or visitor in a long-term care home
- ▶ worker in a retirement home
- ▶ worker or resident in a homeless shelter, group home, hospice or other like setting
- ▶ farm worker
- ▶ person who identifies as indigenous, and
- ▶ an international student having passed a 14-day quarantine period.

If the above criteria do not apply and you have been exposed to a person who might have COVID-19 or you are otherwise unclear whether or not you should get a test contact your health care provider or take the [Government of Ontario self-assessment](#) for further direction.

The Ontario Government and public health units suggest calling 911 or going to emergency at a hospital in case of a medical emergency, including experiencing breathing difficulty or other severe [COVID-19 symptoms](#).



AWAITING TEST RESULTS

If you are **experiencing COVID-19 symptoms**, self-isolate while waiting for test results. Your close contacts (e.g. those in your household) should also self-isolate.

If you are **not experiencing symptoms** but have been exposed to a confirmed or presumed COVID-19 case, self-isolate while waiting for test results. Your close contacts should also isolate except for essential reasons including work, school and groceries.

If you **have not experienced symptoms, were not exposed** to a presumed or confirmed case or not advised to self-isolate, continue as normal, though [self-monitor for symptoms](#) and follow all public health directives including masking, social distancing and hand hygiene.



ACTING ON TEST RESULTS

If **test results are positive**, the local public health unit will

- ▶ Contact the individual and advise them to self-isolate until symptoms improve for 24 hours and for at least 10 days after symptoms started, or 20 days if illness is severe or person is severely immune-compromised (If persons with a positive test aren't experiencing symptoms they will be advised to self-isolate for 10 days following the test date. Those living in the same household as a positive case or person deemed a high-risk contact, must also self-isolate except for essential reasons.)
- ▶ Perform an investigation and contact tracing
- ▶ Contact the employer if the person was at work while infectious for additional information including assistance with tracing
- ▶ Provide guidance to the employer about measures to reduce risk of transmission including 14-day self-isolation for those working "closely" with the infected person
- ▶ Work with the employer to communicate with workforce and public if required.

Public health must respect the privacy of the individual affected and will only disclose their identity to the employer if necessary to address the potential hazard to others.

If test results are negative, public health advises:

- ▶ If you have had contact with a confirmed case, continue self-isolating for the remainder of the required 14 days whether experiencing symptoms or not. Your close contacts should also isolate except for essential reasons including work, school and groceries. If you have symptoms and they persist or worsen, contact your health care provider or complete the [Government of Ontario self-assessment](#) for further direction
- ▶ If you have not had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, tested negative and have no symptoms resume work and continue to follow current public health directives
- ▶ If your test comes back negative, but you begin to develop COVID-19 symptoms, even if they're mild, contact your health care provider or complete the [Government of Ontario self-assessment](#) for further direction.



ASYMPTOMATIC TRANSMISSION

Although Ontario testing criteria has narrowed, broader testing is prudent considering asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic spreaders play a significant role in transmission. According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease expert in the United States, "Evidence shows that 25 to 45 per cent of infected people likely don't have symptoms. And we know from epidemiological studies they can transmit to someone who is uninfected even when they're without symptoms." (Certainly, there are documented cases in Ontario of persons with no symptoms who have spread the virus in dramatic fashion.)

A [research review](#) published in January, 2021 supports Dr. Fauci's observation, finding at least one in three people infected with COVID-19 are asymptomatic.

Consequently, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have observed, "Asymptomatic transmission enhances the need to scale up the capacity for widespread testing and thorough contact tracing to detect asymptomatic infections, interrupt undetected transmission chains, and further bend the curve downward."

Here in Ontario, many are concerned with asymptomatic transmission in schools and would like to see the scaling up of asymptomatic testing for students, teachers and other school staff. To date, this testing is occurring in a very limited fashion.



EMPLOYER REPORTING DUTIES

If an employer has not been contacted by public health and learns of a confirmed or even presumed or suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace they should contact the [local public health unit](#) to seek advice in terms of transmission prevention measures or help with contact tracing. In any case, the Ministry of Labour recommends they perform a [workplace assessment](#) to determine what areas of the workplace might be infected and who else may have been in close contact.

Based on this assessment and guidance from public health, **the employer may need to:**

- ▶ Inform co-workers who were in close contact and have them self monitor or self-isolate for 14 days (If they begin to experience symptoms follow assessment/testing protocol mentioned above and also report to employer.)
- ▶ Shut down the workplace or portion of the workplace to thoroughly clean and disinfect, and
- ▶ Implement other measures based on the advice of public health officials.

Employers are required to protect the privacy of the worker affected.

If an employer is advised a worker has an illness, including COVID-19, due to an exposure at the workplace or a claim has been filed with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), the [employer must notify](#), within four days, the:

- ▶ Ministry of Labour
- ▶ workplace joint health and safety committee or worker health and safety rep, and
- ▶ trade union, if any.

In the health care sector, illness outbreaks must be monitored and reported to the Public Health Unit as required by the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. Outbreaks in long-term care homes must be reported to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Within three days of learning a worker has COVID-19, the employer must report it to the [Workplace Safety and Insurance Board](#) (WSIB). Even if an employer is unsure if the COVID-19 case was the result of workplace transmission, the WSIB advises reporting.



WORKER REPORTING DUTIES

As per public health directives, workers experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or who test positive should not go to work and should [report their illness-related absence to their supervisor or employer](#).

Those testing positive should [file a claim with the WSIB](#).

If a worker believes they were exposed to the COVID-19 virus at work but are not exhibiting symptoms they can [file a WSIB exposure incident form](#) ([construction workers](#) file using a sector specific form). This is a good way to document the exposure should it lead to a confirmed case of COVID-19. In fact, employers who become aware of potential exposure incidents are also encouraged to [file similar exposure incident forms](#).



FURTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Review additional [WHSC COVID-19 resources](#) at www.whsc.on.ca. Register for our [COVID-19 training program](#) now available in online virtual classrooms.

Need more help still?

Contact your worker member of the joint health and safety committee, worker representative, or union representative if you have one.

Contact Workers Health & Safety Centre at contactus@whsc.on.ca, [1-888-869-7950](tel:1-888-869-7950) or contact a [WHSC Training Services Representative](#) directly.