

Guidance for Employers on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace

As health authorities around the world take action to contain the spread of COVID-19, employers must also play a role in stopping the spread of this disease. This guidance document describes the requirements of employers as per [provincial regulations](#) and local orders and directives. It also provides simple strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace to keep everyone safe. These strategies can and should be adapted to meet the unique needs of every workplace. Additional guidance for various sectors is found on the [Ministry's website](#). The aim and purpose of this document is to assist individuals and businesses with information related to the Ontario Government's reopening framework as well as the Porcupine Health Unit requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is important to know that breaches of some of these directions will constitute offences under provincial regulations or other public health legal requirements. While we aim to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to, nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional.

General Guidance

- Encourage employees to [get vaccinated](#).
- Visit our website at <https://www.porcupinehu.on.ca/en/your-health/infectious-diseases/novel-coronavirus/covid-business-and-workplace/> often, as information changes frequently.
- Develop strategies to minimize exposure to COVID-19.
- Provide staff training on the required public health measures.
- Limit number of staff, clients and customers in indoor settings to allow for physical distancing and to comply with capacity limits, as per provincial regulations.
- Schedule frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-touch items, surfaces, and washrooms.
- Inform staff, clients and customers about actions you are taking to keep everyone safe.
- Review the Guidance for Employers on Managing COVID-19 in the Workplace to plan and implement protocols to keep staff, customers and patrons safe

Roles and Responsibilities of the Employer and Employee during COVID-19

Employer Responsibilities	Employee Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep workers and workplaces safe and free of hazards.• Read the guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act to understand all of your health and safety rights and responsibilities.• Understand COVID-19 risks.• Control COVID-19 risks in the workplace.• Develop a COVID-19 workplace safety plan.• Comply with any advice, recommendations and instructions by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and your municipalities bylaws relevant to your organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refuse unsafe work and promptly report the circumstances to your employer or supervisor.• Understand and follow your employers' workplace health and safety directions (e.g., use or wear the personal protective equipment that your employer requires)• Follow direction from public health officials.• Report any circumstance in the workplace that is likely to be hazardous to the health or safety of others in the workplace. This includes reporting one's own potential exposure to COVID-19 that caused or is likely to cause illness to another person.

Safety Plan

- All businesses and workplaces are required to prepare a safety plan. This safety plan must:
 - Describe measures/procedures that have been or will be implemented in the business, place, facility or establishment to reduce spread of COVID-19.
 - Include measures for screening, physical distancing, masks, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) and preventing and controlling crowding.

- Operators of some businesses, places or events must also include information for how their business, place or event will:
 - prevent gatherings and crowds in the business or place or at the event;
 - ensure that physical distancing and wearing of masks, as required, while waiting in line-ups is complied with in the business or place or at the event; and
 - mitigate the risk of any interactive activities, exhibits or games that may be included in the business or place or at the event.
- These operators include: restaurants, bars, etc.; food and drink establishments with dance facilities; personal physical fitness trainers; sports and recreational fitness facilities; concert venues, theatres, cinemas; drive-in and drive-through venues; museums and other attractions; casinos, bingo halls and gaming establishments; racing venues; amusement parks; fairs, rural exhibitions and festivals.
 - Be in writing and made available to any person for review on request.
 - Be posted in a visible place to come to the attention of those working or attending the location.
- Assign a lead person who will be responsible for developing and implementing the safety plan.
- Use the [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) template to develop your safety plan.

Health Screening for Staff and Customers

The person responsible for the business or organization must comply with any advice, recommendations, and instructions issued by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health on [screening employees](#) and [patrons](#) ([O. Reg. 364/20](#)).

Note changes to screening tool: Individuals who are fully vaccinated can select "No" for some questions. See screening tool for details.

Screening of Staff

- Staff must complete a health screening questionnaire before each shift (active screening).
 - Online screening can be completed prior to entering the workplace using the [provincial screening tool for workers and employees](#).
 - In-person screening can be completed on paper using the staff screening questionnaire ([also available in other languages](#)).
- Screening should occur before or when a worker enters the workplace at the beginning of their day or shift, or when an essential visitor arrives.
- For workers who travel to multiple locations as part of their work (e.g., delivery truck drivers), the worker's employer is responsible for conducting the screening prior to each shift. The receiving business or organization may also screen the worker before entry.
- If staff become sick with [COVID-19 symptoms](#) while at work, they should go home right away and [self-isolate](#). Instruct them to call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000, their health care provider or an [Assessment Centre](#) to get tested.

Screening of Customers

- Some businesses or organizations are required to conduct active screening of all patrons who enter their facility, including:
 - Businesses that provide teaching and instruction
 - Casinos, bingo halls and gaming establishments
 - Driving instruction
 - Food and drink establishments with dance facilities
 - Indoor and outdoor sports and recreational fitness facilities
 - Meeting or event space, conference centres, convention centres
 - Personal care services
 - Personal physical fitness trainers
 - Photography studios and services (indoors)
 - Restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments
 - Retailers that allow testing driving of vehicles, boats, watercrafts.

- Where active screening of patrons is not required, businesses and organizations must post a sign and ask all clients and customers to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms or exposures prior to entry to your workplace or business.
 - Display [posters](#) at entrances informing people that they must not enter if they do not pass the screening.
 - Clients and customers can also be asked to complete the [provincial screening tool for customers](#) online prior to entering a place of business.

Conducting Active Screening

- Designate an area outside, near the main entrance, as a screening station for in-person screening.
 - The area should be clearly identifiable as the screening station.
 - Explain the screening process and conditions for entry.
 - The area must allow for a minimum of two metres distance between staff conducting screening and the individual being screened. Alternatively, a protective barrier (e.g. plexiglass) may be equipped around the screening station.
 - If physical distancing or a barrier is not possible, staff conducting the screening should wear appropriate personal protective equipment including a surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (goggles or face shield).
 - Use visual markers/cues (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) as a guide for physical distancing for staff, person being screened and persons waiting to be screened.
 - Temperature checks are not required, nor recommended.

Rapid Antigen Testing

- Rapid antigen testing, also called Point-of-Care (POC) testing, is a test that can be done on-site for workers without symptoms. The test is conducted by a health professional or trained individual and results are ready in 15 minutes.
- If rapid testing is used, it should only be performed as a second screening step for workers who have passed the health screening questionnaire.
- Rapid testing should not be used to diagnose COVID-19 for a person who has symptoms or who has been exposed to person with COVID-19.
- A person with a positive result from a rapid test must seek laboratory-based PCR testing within 24 hours. They must isolate while waiting for their confirmatory test result.
- Rapid testing does not replace other public health measures such as physical distancing and masking, even if a person tests negative.
- The Provincial Antigen Screening Program provides free rapid antigen test kits to eligible businesses with >150 employees. For more information read the [Ontario News Release](#). To see if your business is eligible, visit the [Provincial Antigen Testing Program](#) website.
- Rapid antigen testing programs for employees are not required by the Porcupine Health Unit or under the Reopening Ontario Act. There are limited circumstances in which workplaces may be recommended by PHU to participate in rapid antigen testing programs.

Staff Attendance and Operations

- Employers are encouraged to enable and support workers to work remotely wherever possible and accommodate household needs related to virtual education and dependent care.
 - Consider cancelling or holding virtually all in-person activities that are discretionary.
 - Host virtual meetings.
- Keep a list of the names and contact information of all staff, workers and essential visitors who enter the workplace, including for in-person meetings or events. This will support contact tracing.
- This information must be kept for 30 days and then shredded.
- This information must be provided to the Porcupine Health Unit upon request.

Note: Some businesses are also required to maintain contact information for all patrons/visitors who enter their facility or use their services, including:

- Businesses that provide teaching and instruction
- Food and drink establishments with dance facilities
- Indoor and outdoor sports and recreational fitness facilities
- Meeting and event spaces
- Personal physical fitness trainers
- Restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments
- Tour and guide services, including boat tours
- Remind staff about the importance of staying home when they are sick and reporting illness to their supervisor/manager.
- Make plans to operate with different levels of employee absenteeism due to illness, ill dependants, or for child care during school closures.
- Plan business functions, jobs, roles and critical elements within your business that are essential or critical when public health restrictions are in place, or if staffing levels are reduced.
- Non-essential work travel, including within Canada, should be limited.
- Travellers entering Canada must self-isolate for 14 days after they return from travel anywhere outside of Canada, including the United States.
 - Healthy individuals that cross the border and are performing an [essential job or function](#) are exempt from self-isolation under the Quarantine Act, but they must self-monitor for symptoms.
 - Fully vaccinated travellers may be exempt as per [federal quarantine requirements](#).
 - For more information on travel restrictions, visit the [Government of Canada website](#).
- Prepare for staff reporting sick
- Have a flexible sick policy so staff do not come to work when they are ill.
- Ensure that all employees are aware of the income replacement and workplace-related benefits they are entitled to if they have to isolate due to symptoms of COVID-19, being tested for COVID-19, or being a close contact of someone with COVID-19.

- Up to three days of [paid infectious disease emergency leave](#) is also available for workers for reasons related to COVID-19, such as awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test, being sick or providing care for a family member, or getting vaccinated.
- They may also be eligible for [Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit \(CRSB\)](#).
- The Porcupine Health Unit does not recommend that employers require clearance testing or doctor's notes for return to work.

Promote Physical Distancing

- Employers are required to ensure that physical distancing of at least two metres takes place by staff throughout the workplace and during eating and rest periods (e.g., lunchrooms, change rooms, washrooms).
 - Masks and physical barriers provide added layers of protection, but are not substitutes for physical distancing.
- Limit the number of staff and contractors present at the workplace at any given time.
 - Enable flexible work hours and schedules.
 - Stagger work shifts and breaks to reduce gathering in common areas (e.g. entrance, lunch room, locker room).
 - Assign staff to groups that are physically separated in different areas or have rotating schedules, if possible, so that groups do not mix at any time.
 - Assign workstations and equipment to a single user if possible, or limit the number of users.
 - Post signs with the number of people allowed into the premise and within each room/space.
- Minimize instances of more than one individual in a vehicle for driving associated with work. If unavoidable, ensure face coverings are worn in the vehicle (preferably medical masks), and drive with the windows open.
- Encourage staff who carpool to limit the number of passengers in their car, not to drive or ride if they are sick, and to follow [public health guidance for taxis and ride-share vehicles](#).

Limit capacity

- Subject to any other provisions within [O. Reg. 364/20](#), businesses and facilities open to the public must limit the number of members of the public in the facility so that they are able to maintain at least two metres physical distancing from people they don't live with.
- Some businesses, organizations and services are subject to different capacity restrictions (e.g. sports and recreational fitness facilities). See [sector specific guidance](#) for details.

Modify Services and Space to Promote Physical Distancing

- Modify services to reduce the number of patrons present at the same time:
 - Consider cancelling or holding virtually in-person activities that are discretionary or for those at higher risk of COVID-19.
 - Provide services online or by phone whenever possible.
 - Offer mail, product or curbside delivery, and follow contact-less delivery practices.
- Modify and manage the physical space to promote physical distancing:
 - Install one-way walkways to reduce close physical interactions
 - Remove surplus furniture and supplies from rooms and walkways to allow ease of movement while maintaining physical distancing.
 - Move or tape off furniture in lunch rooms, meeting rooms, etc. so staff or customers cannot sit within two metres from each other.
 - Close off alternate work stations and/or customer service windows/check-outs where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
 - Use visual markers (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) to remind people where to stand to keep two metre distance from others (e.g. on a production line).
 - Implement [physical barriers](#) (e.g. plexiglass), when physical distancing is not possible.
 - The height of the barrier should take into account the tallest user and should consider the user's breathing zone, which generally extends 30 centimeters or 12 inches around (and above) the mid-point of a person's face.
 - Physical distancing is always preferable to the use of barriers.
 - Use outdoor space whenever possible.

- Manage employee and patron lines inside and outside the business or place.
 - Operators must ensure customers maintain two metres distance from other groups of persons and wear a mask or face covering while in line inside the business or place.
 - Operators are required to ensure that patrons maintain two metres physical distance from other groups of persons while in line or congregating outside the business or place. Masks are recommended while waiting in line outdoors.
- Post [physical distancing signs](#) at all entrances, employee rooms, elevators, and public areas (e.g. cashiers, service counters).

Encourage Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

- Post [Wash your Hands](#), [Cover your Cough](#), [Workplace Measures](#) signs in high traffic areas.
- Ensure hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) and hand-washing facilities are provided in work and rest areas throughout the facility.
- Ensure an adequate supply of liquid soap, paper towel, hand sanitizer, tissues, and waste receptacles throughout the workplace, and in washrooms.
- Glove use is not a substitute for proper hand hygiene.
 - If gloves are used, it is important to change them every hour, or more often, as necessary (e.g. when changing tasks).
 - Hands should be washed and/or sanitized between changes.
 - When gloves are removed, new gloves must be used each time.
- Educate staff on [proper hand hygiene](#) and [respiratory etiquette](#).

Enhance Cleaning and Disinfection

- Implement rigorous and frequent environmental cleaning and disinfection in all high-touch areas and areas that are accessible to the public, including washrooms, check-out counters, concession stands, and other high-touch surfaces, such as doorknobs, elevator buttons, etc.
- Washrooms, locker rooms, change rooms, showers or similar amenities made available to the public must be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.

- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces at least twice a day and more frequently as needed. High touch surfaces include items such as door handles, counters, cabinet doors, elevator buttons, light switches, faucets, toilet handles, hand rails, touch screen surfaces, and keypads.
- Any equipment that is rented to, provided to or provided for the use of members of the public must be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
- Equipment and tools that must be shared should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, including between users (e.g. cashier's stations, machinery). If staff are separated into assigned groups, clean and disinfect shared spaces between rotating groups.
- Choosing cleaners and disinfectants:
 - Cleaners break down grease and other organic material from surfaces. Most regular household cleaning products are effective at reducing the amount of germs on surfaces.
 - Disinfectants kill germs that remain on surfaces even after cleaning.
 - Look for cleaning and disinfectant products with an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN) to confirm it is approved for use in Canada.
 - Refer to Health Canada's [list of hard surface disinfectants for use against COVID-19](#).
 - Cleaning/disinfection wipes should only be used for surfaces.
 - Check the expiry dates of products and always follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Ensure adequate ventilation when using products (e.g. open windows, doors, or use fans).
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning the setting.
- Review Public Health Ontario's [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings fact sheet](#).
- Educate staff on how to [maintain a clean workplace during COVID-19](#), including:
 - Proper use of cleaning agents and disinfectants, including required disinfectant contact times (amount of time that the product needs to remain wet on a surface to work effectively).
 - Safety precautions and requirements for use of mask and gloves

Masks/Face Coverings for Staff, Clients and Customers

The use of non-medical masks or face coverings is required in all indoor public spaces under [the O. Reg. 364/20](#).

- Operators must ensure that any person in the indoor area of the business or organization, or in a vehicle that is operating as part of the business or organization, wears a mask or face covering in a manner that covers their nose, mouth and chin while they are in the indoor area.
- The person responsible for a business or organization shall ensure that every person who performs work for the business or organization and whose mask or face covering is temporarily removed to consume food or drink is separated from every other person by
 - a distance of at least two metres; or
 - plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier.
- Not all clients or customers are able to tolerate a mask and may be [exempted](#). For example, masks should not be used by children under age two, and anyone who has trouble breathing.
- Other [exemptions](#) include temporary removal of a mask to receive certain services (e.g. during a dental exam); for emergency or medical purposes; or if working in an area not accessible to the public **and** able to maintain physical distance of two metres from others (e.g. sitting alone in a private office).
- Consider alternative ways to provide services to those who are unable to wear a mask (e.g. provide services at the end of the day when other customers are not present, use barriers such as plexiglass, and maintain physical distance when possible).
- If possible, provide disposable masks for clients or customers who have not brought their own.
- Train staff on these new requirements, including who is exempt and the [proper use of a cloth mask or face covering](#)

Personal Protective Equipment

- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (goggles or face shield) must be worn if physical distancing of two metres or separation via a physical barrier cannot be maintained at all times.
- Additional PPE may be required for other roles within the workplace (e.g. first aid attendant). The employer must determine when and what PPE is required, and ensure that it is worn by workers.
- Train employees on how to [put on and take off PPE safely](#)

Maintain Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Systems

- Conduct or have the property owner or landlord conduct a regular review of HVAC systems to ensure it operating properly.
- Consider consulting an HVAC specialist to determine if the HVAC system is suitable for the type of setting, type of activity, number of occupants, and the length of time the space is occupied.
- Increase the introduction and circulation of outdoor air by maximizing the outdoor air ratio of the HVAC system settings, or by opening windows and doors, where possible. Avoid recirculating air.
- Where provided, use the highest efficiency filters that are compatible with the HVAC system.
- Increase air-exchanges if possible.
- Keep areas near HVAC inlets and outlets clear.
 - Seating should be arranged away from areas with high airflow (i.e. not in front of air vents).
- Facilities without HVAC systems should increase ventilation by opening windows and doors. However, do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to staff and customers.
- Rooms where ceiling fans are used should have an upward airflow rotation.
- If portable fans are used, limit the blowing of air across people and surfaces by positioning them to provide an upward movement of air.
- Portable air purifiers/cleaners equipped with a HEPA filter could potentially reduce exposure to COVID-19. If used, follow the manufacturer's directions (and possibly the advice of a service professional) to decide where best to place the device. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on maintenance. Portable air cleaners are not a substitute for proper ventilation and other preventive measures.

Communication

- Inform staff and customers about the measures being taken to protect them against COVID-19.
- Encourage staff and customers to download the [COVID Alert app](#) so they can be notified directly if they have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.
- Display information throughout your setting to promote messages about how to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as [COVID-19: Stop the Spread](#).

Vaccination

- Encourage staff to get vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine.
 - Review [COVID-19 Vaccine Information Sheet](#).
 - Read and share information about how to book an appointment for the vaccine.
- Consider developing workplace policies that encourage vaccination and make it easier to get a vaccine, such as allowing staff time off to go for vaccine appointments.
- Post signs and share [COVID-19 vaccine resources](#) with staff, workers and patrons.
- Learn more about how [COVID-19 vaccines help make your workplace safer](#).

Other Resources:

- Province of Ontario: [Guidance to Prevent COVID-19 in the Workplace](#) (for sector-specific guidance)
- Province of Ontario: [COVID-19 Support for Businesses](#)
- Province of Ontario: [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Rapid Antigen Point-of-Care Screening](#)
- Government of Canada: [COVID-19: Your Rights and Responsibilities as an Employee](#)
- Government of Canada: [Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety: [COVID-19 Tip Sheets](#)

More information

For more information visit phu.fyi/covid-business to stay up to date

Adapted with permission from Toronto Public Health