

COVID-19 FOR EMPLOYERS

A GUIDING DOCUMENT TO HELP
NAVIGATE RETURNING TO WORK



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Ontario has started to enter into Phase Two reopening, as such businesses and organizations are in the midst of determining what modifications can be made to ensure the safety of their customers and employers while optimizing outputs and minimizing revenue loss.

Building on the provincial document “A Framework for Re-Opening our Province”, the COVID-19 for Employers Guidance Document provides broad best practices for office, service and industrial based businesses by using upstream public health and data driven approaches such as utilizing evidence sourced from high quality resources and vetted by public health experts, including: physicians, epidemiologists, health, data, research and policy analysts.

This guidance document is meant to be a starting point, we recommend each business develop protocols specifically targeted to their model, as such ETIO has developed further tools and packages to assist in this regard. Please contact us to learn more about how ETIO can help optimize your business while ensuring the safety of your customers and employees.

Yours sincerely,

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02

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all industries, temporarily shutting down certain businesses while deeming others essential. Regardless of the industry, the pandemic has prompted an unprecedented global state of emergency, in which businesses have had to rapidly adapt to changing environments. The reopening of many businesses in Ontario calls on evidence-informed guidelines to help employers, employees, and customers remain as safe as possible throughout this process. The ways in which businesses approach reopening will play a critical role in the impact COVID-19 ultimately has in Ontario.

SCOPE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document will serve as a comprehensive yet concise guide to aid employers in the process of returning to work. After outlining what the Ontario reopening plan entails, as well as some brief facts about COVID-19, the document will describe the key factors to consider when reopening a business in the safest possible way. Such factors have been divided into cleanliness and safety measures, with specific considerations for different types of workplaces. The document also describes the best mental health practices to ensure that employers and employees alike are coping well during this difficult time. Additional resources will be provided for further expansion on the mentioned topics, as well as materials that employers can use to ensure a safe and efficient return to work.



03

ONTARIO'S REOPENING PLAN

The Ontario government has detailed a roadmap for reopening Ontario's economy in discrete phases. Ontario's movement along the roadmap will depend on active surveillance and evidence, through key indicators related to virus spread, health system/public health system capacity, and incidence tracking capacity. There is no timeline for this roadmap, because the COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving challenge and may require protective measures to be reinstated in the event of future outbreaks. This will likely be the case until a vaccine is developed and distributed.

Protect and Support

- Emergency orders are enacted to reduce infection risk. This involves the closure of non-essential workplaces, public spaces, recreational areas and restaurants.
- For workplaces with staff working at multiple sites, restrictions may also entail keeping employees working at the same location in order to reduce virus spread.

Restart

- The government's focus lies on slowly reopening Ontario's economy in stages, with a step-by-step approach to monitoring the landscape of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Ensuring workplaces can open safely and have their business needs met is a priority at this stage.
- The government plans to release guidelines for workplace safety.
- Service industries and additional office and retail workplaces may be allowed to open based on risk assessments.

Recover

- If loosening of public health measures continues to occur successfully based on key indicators, the government will consider opening all workplaces in a manner that ensures safety.
- Large public gatherings such as concerts and sporting events will likely continue to be restricted.

PHASE 1

PHASE 2

PHASE 3



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COVID-19 QUICK FACTS

COVID-19 is a **contagious** respiratory disease that is spread from an infected person, even if they do not have symptoms, through:

- Respiratory droplets when they cough, sneeze or speak.
- Close personal contact.
- Touching something with the virus on it, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Symptoms on average take 5 days to appear after exposure to the virus but may take up to 14 days. There have been reports of a wide spectrum of signs and symptoms, the most common include:

- Fever
- Dry cough
- Difficulty breathing

Self-isolate if any of the following apply:

- You have been diagnosed with COVID-19, or are waiting to hear the results of a lab test for COVID-19.
- You have symptoms of COVID-19.
- You have been in contact with a suspected, probable or confirmed case of COVID-19.

There is currently **no vaccine or cure** for COVID-19. However, most people recover from the disease without needing hospital treatment.

People of **all ages** can become infected; however, the most **vulnerable populations** include:

- Age 65 and over
- Compromised immune system
- Underlying medical conditions:
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Respiratory Conditions
 - Diabetes
 - Cancer

Individuals can be contagious **two days before** showing any signs or symptoms.

Infected individuals are the most contagious on the **first day** that symptoms are present.

Quarantine for 14 days if you have no symptoms and either of the following apply:

- You are returning from travel outside the province or outside of Canada.
- You had close contact with someone who has or is suspected to have COVID-19.

If you are **concerned** that you may have been exposed to, or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, please visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>



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CLEANLINESS



Respiratory droplets from infected individuals can land on surfaces. Others can become infected by touching these surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. This is why it is important to frequently sanitize highly touched surfaces. The COVID-19 virus can survive for up to 72 hours on stainless steel and plastic, less than 24 hours on cardboard, and less than 4 hours on copper.

PERSONAL SAFETY



Measures taken by individuals can greatly impact their safety and the safety of others. The use of personal protective equipment, such as masks, and staying home when you are sick can significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

6 FT



Individuals can contract COVID-19 by breathing in the respiratory droplets of someone who is infected. This is why it is important to stay at least 6 feet away from others. All types of businesses should take the necessary measures in order to facilitate physical distancing in the workplace.



06

WORKPLACE CLEANLINESS

Maintaining hygiene and cleanliness is important for preventing the spread of COVID-19. As such, workplaces should increase the frequency and thoroughness of cleaning - especially for **high-traffic areas and objects** including:

- Doors
- Elevator buttons
- Faucets
- Toilet handles
- Light switches
- Etc.

These surfaces should be cleaned at minimum twice-daily.

Additionally, management should provide custodial staff with **adequate supplies for cleaning**:

- Adequate soap and detergent to keep up with demand.
- Disinfectants with a **Drug Identification Number (DIN)**.
- Cleaning products that **clean and disinfect** at the same time.

All staff should also be aware of droplet precaution. Respiratory droplets are small droplets of moisture that come from someone's mouth/nose when they breathe or talk. These droplets may land on surfaces. If the person is infected, there may be viruses in the droplets that may now be on the object. As such, it is

important to clean frequently touched surfaces throughout the day.

Additionally, all staff should be encouraged to perform proper hand and respiratory hygiene.

Proper **hand hygiene** includes activities such as:

- Regularly washing hands for 20 seconds with **soap and water**.
 - Where soap and water is not available, an alcohol-based **hand sanitizer (more than 60% alcohol)** can be used.
- Washing hands when entering the workplace.
- Washing hands **before and after** touching the **mouth, eyes, or nose**.
- Washing hands **before and after** wearing **gloves/personal protective equipment**.

Proper respiratory hygiene is also important, entailing the following:

- Covering your mouth with a **tissue** when you sneeze or cough.
 - When a tissue is not available, cover your mouth with the **bend of your elbow (not your hand)**.
- **Disposing of used tissues** immediately, and washing your hands afterwards.



07

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Overall, workplaces should ensure that all staff understand the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 (see COVID-19 Facts), as well as individual safety precautions. Staff experiencing any of the signs of COVID-19 should be encouraged to take the self-assessment that is available on the Government of Ontario Website (covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/), and seek testing if necessary. Additionally, managers should ensure that there are adequate supplies for employees to carry out proper hand and respiratory hygiene.

To promote proper hand and respiratory hygiene, workplaces should ensure sufficient amounts of hand soap, hand sanitizer, and tissues are available. Managers should also ensure there is adequate signage to remind all staff to use proper hand and respiratory hygiene, as well as where to find the correct supplies. Templates for these signs are included on the **Additional Resources page**. Finally, all workplaces should post their policies on COVID-19 so that all staff can refer to how the workplace will operate, and how to carry out proper precautions.

Common to all workplace settings, managers should try to find ways to promote physical distancing, air circulation, and hygiene:

- When possible, staff should be allowed to **work from home** to reduce the number of employees in the workplace at any time
 - When not possible, managers are encouraged to **stagger shifts** and breaks so that less staff are in common areas/workplaces
- Managers should find ways to improve **air circulation** in the workplace
- All staff should be aware of **droplet precaution** (see Cleanliness)

The following notes are guidelines meant to guide risk reduction activities. They are organized by workspace type (i.e. office, service, and industrial settings), allowing them to be applied to many industries. However, employers and managers should conduct a risk assessment to see which guidelines are applicable, and whether there are additional guidelines from the Workplace Safety & Prevention Services.



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WORKPLACE SAFETY: OFFICE-BASED ENVIRONMENT

1. Limit the number of staff in the office. Avoiding close contact with others significantly reduces the risk of transmission of COVID-19, and allows for easier adherence of physical distancing measures.

Recommendations:

- If possible, allow staff to **work from home**
- When it is not possible to work from home, consider rotating staff in the office.
- **Stagger shifts** and breaks to reduce the number of people in the office.

2. Reorganize the office to allow for physical distancing. Physical distancing should be maintained to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Recommendations:

- Ensure work stations are at least **2 m (6 ft) apart**.
- Discourage employees from sharing common surfaces/items (e.g. keyboards, mice, pens).

3. Limit the number of visitors to the workplace. Avoiding unnecessary contact with individuals from outside the workplace can reduce the risk of COVID-19 from entering the workplace.

Recommendations:

- When possible, encourage **phone or video calls** to conduct meetings.

- When not possible, ensure there are adequate protocols in place to **screen for COVID-19 symptoms**.
- Have visitors **wash their hands** upon entering the building.
- Limit the number of staff that come into close/direct contact with visitors.
- Where direct contact is unavoidable, ensure staff have the proper **personal protective equipment (PPE)**, and are trained on their use.
- After the meeting, **keep contact details** of the attendees - these may be important for contact tracing efforts if someone tests positive for COVID-19 later on.

4. Limit the number of gatherings in the workplace. Gatherings can significantly reduce the ability to maintain physical distancing, leading to increased risk.

Recommendations:

- When possible, encourage phone or video calls to conduct meetings.
- When not possible, **limit the number of attendees to 5**, if there is enough space (i.e. at least 2 m/6 ft between staff).

5. Ensure there is frequent cleaning of the workplace (see Cleanliness).



09 WORKPLACE SAFETY: SERVICE-BASED ENVIRONMENT

1. Reduce the number of customers in the store. Local health units may require businesses to have reduced capacity to limit the number of people in the establishment.

Recommendations:

- Offer **alternative shopping methods** such as online ordering, curbside pickup, or at home delivery.
- For home delivery, require **pre-payment** of goods/services.
- Limit the total number of people in the store (includes staff and customers).

2. Ensure physical distancing is possible. How this takes place will depend on the layout of the establishment, and should be carried out on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendations:

- In physically constrained places such as aisles or storage areas, **control the direction of foot traffic** so people do not have to break physical distancing to pass each other.
- At the point of sale, **place markings** at 2 m (6 ft) intervals to remind customers to practise proper physical distancing.
- Ensure there is at least 2 m (6 ft) between customers and cashiers.

3. Ensure proper hygiene is practised by staff and customers. Hand and respiratory hygiene are important for all individuals at a retail space, and can help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Recommendations:

- Ensure staff follow the **proper hygiene practices**, and know how to properly clean workstations between customer interactions.
- Provide **hand sanitizer at the entry/exit** for customers to use upon entry.
- Appoint a **Health and Safety Point Person** for every shift to ensure all staff and customers follow physical distancing and hygiene protocols.

4. Minimize contact between staff, supplies, and customers, including products. Surfaces can act as sources of transmission for COVID-19 when droplets from an infected person stay on the object and are subsequently touched by someone else.

Recommendations:

- Encourage the use of **cashless forms of payment** (e.g. debit/credit or e-payment).
- **Do not accept customers' reusable bags.**
- Install **plexiglass barriers** at points of sale to prevent droplets from going between people.
- When possible, schedule deliveries for outside of customer hours.

5. Ensure there is frequent cleaning of the workplace. Regular, frequent cleaning can help reduce the risk of coming into contact with the virus (see Cleanliness).



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WORKPLACE SAFETY: INDUSTRIAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Consider droplet precautions for both incoming and outgoing products. Depending on the type of surface, droplets from individuals may accumulate on the product, posing a risk for infection.

Recommendations:

- Examine the possibility of installing **plexiglass barriers/sneeze guards** between staff and the products to reduce chances of respiratory droplets on outgoing products.
- Consider the sourcing of products, and whether or not they will need **disinfection upon arrival**.
- Limit the amount of people handling the same products/packaging.

2. Where necessary, consider the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE such as single-use gloves and face shields can act as barriers between staff and products to limit contact with potential droplets.

Recommendations:

- Staff should be aware of proper PPE use, and how to **mitigate cross-contamination** (e.g. washing hands before and after using gloves, changing gloves between activities, etc).
- Where plexiglass barriers are not possible, consider the use of **face shields** to protect against respiratory droplets.

3. Promote physical distancing within the workspace. Although industrial settings may have large workshops/production floors, areas such as offices, bathrooms, and break rooms may have limited space.

Recommendations:

- Where space is limited, **alter the floor-plan** to allow for one-direction traffic, promoting physical distancing between staff.
- Consider **staggering shifts** and breaks to limit the number of people in offices, break rooms, etc.

4. Consider reducing the workload to essential tasks. Are these activities that can be performed later on, or on a less frequent basis?

Recommendations:

- When possible, limit the amount of work being carried out at the same time, to **reduce the number of staff on-site**.

5. Ensure there is frequent cleaning of the workplace. Regular, frequent cleaning can help reduce the risk of coming into contact with the virus (see Cleanliness).



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MENTAL HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented levels of distress and anxiety, which could be exacerbated through the process of returning to work. Providing the necessary resources, conducting routine check-ins, and validating arising emotions can help alleviate some of the stress associated with the pandemic, as well as establish longterm workplace mental health policies.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR EMPLOYEES

When checking in on your employees, make sure to do so on an individual basis, attempting to understand how each individual is doing personally.

- Transparent communication
- Provide mental health resources
 - Direct to free services
 - Provide subscription to paid services
- Frequent check-ins with teams and individuals
- Allow for flexible work hours if possible
- Increase paid sick leave if possible
- Implement fun, non-work activities to increase morale

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

When taking care of yourself, try to think of coping strategies that have worked for you in previous stressful situations. Self care should not add stress or pressure.

- Limit your exposure to the news
- Exercise regularly
- Stay connected with friends and family
- Try to maintain a routine
- Enjoy the outdoors if possible
- Stress management techniques, such as meditation and breath work
- Check-in with yourself frequently

Additional mental health resources can be found on the Resources page.



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SUMMARY

Reopening businesses in a time of uncertainty will require flexibility, consistent risk assessments, and an understanding of employee and consumer needs. Employees should be informed and regularly updated on COVID-19 in the context of the workplace. Employers should facilitate employee understanding of any evolving health and safety policies, policies related to sick leave, working from home and other developments. This may be accomplished by placing simple, plain-language signage around the workplace and distributing accessible health and safety information/protocols.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that there is a significant amount of misinformation related to COVID-19. Employers should provide accessible information on COVID-19 facts and precautions from reliable, evidence-based sources such as from government and public health organizations. Employers can also support their work force by providing information about available mental health and wellness resources.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

COVID-19 Safety Resources:

COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool:

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>

Alberta Health Service's COVID-19 Signage and Poster Templates (hand washing guides, PPE, droplet precautions etc.):

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17000.aspx>

Guidance from the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/resources-prevent-covid-19-workplace#section-1>

Mental Health and Wellness Resources:

Mental Health Commission of Canada's WEBINAR Series on Supporting Worker Mental Health:

<https://theworkingmind.ca/blog/how-support-mental-health-workers-times-change-and-uncertainty-responding-pandemic>

Ottawa Public Health's Employer Guide for Supporting Employee Mental Health:

<https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/resources/Corona/Covid-19-Employers-Guide-v2020.3-EN-Accessible.pdf>



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