

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Health and Safety for Lawn Care Workers during COVID-19

OVERVIEW

This is not a legal document and employers are advised to seek legal advice.

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 and work sites 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 by filing a complaint 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

We know that every workplace is unique. That makes it so important that every workplace assess functions carried out by their workforce to ensure they take action to protect against the hazards presented by COVID-19.

Things like practicing physical distancing (staying 2 metres away from others), proper hand hygiene, keeping surfaces and objects clean, and preventing contact with potentially infected people –these are all critically important measures. Other information on how you can protect yourself is available on ontario.ca/coronavirus.

We have provided some protection advice below for your consideration. Please keep in mind that introducing any new protective measures should be done as part of a full review of other workplace hazards -- not just COVID 19 alone. Employers should consult with Joint Health and Safety Committees/Health and Safety Representatives in the workplace on measures to protect workers in the workplace. We want to ensure we enhance our safety, not cause other issues.

Some workplaces already have some existing controls in place that may help reduce the risk of exposure to workers as well, so regular 'check-ins' on how controls are helping is highly recommended.

RECOGNIZE HAZARD/ASSESS RISKS

For lawn care workers, we recognize that you will have contact with people, including suppliers, customers and co-workers, as well as contact with surfaces, such as tools, equipment, machinery and surfaces within your vehicle and at the sites that you visit. You could potentially come in contact with droplets from these interactions. COVID-19 can travel in respiratory droplets that are released into the environment by laughing, coughing or sneezing.

Take a look at where you might minimize those risks within your workplace. Consult [public health information](#) to learn the symptoms of COVID-19 infection. Recognize and report these hazards and use appropriate controls. Ensure that you or your co-workers stay home if you or they have symptoms.

We understand – so it's important to take a look at where you can possibly minimize those risks within your workplace. Take a look at the controls below to see how they may assist you.

CONTROLS

Here are a number of options for protecting landscaping workers from exposure to COVID-19:

- Train everyone on possible COVID-19 transmission points in the workplace, what steps are being taken to protect them, and how they can protect themselves, including frequent hand washing or sanitizing, and not touching their face.
- Are there tasks you can minimize or eliminate? For example, can non-essential projects be eliminated or postponed?
- Practice physical distancing (staying 2 metres away from others) during job activities. For example, maintain distance while loading and unloading equipment from truck or trailer.
- Practice physical distancing during breaks.
- Can you control and limit the number of people in a workspace (vehicle/worksite) at one time?
- Consider job rotation. Have fewer workers doing the same task on a work site.
- Can you safely install barriers or partitions between yourself and other coworkers within vehicles?
- Consider multiple trips when transporting to the worksite or consider the use of a second vehicle to ensure physical distance between workers at all times.
- Use your vehicle's climate control system to improve fresh air intake/air circulation. Increased airflow can reduce contaminant build up.
- Try to limit the number of employees using lawn care equipment. If possible, assign each employee to their own piece of equipment, (e.g. leaf blower, mowers, string trimmer etc.).
- Increase the cleaning frequency of your workspace – on everything from vehicle door handles to commonly touched surfaces like cell phones, gas cans, keys, lawn care equipment, powered hand tools, steering wheels, and radio controls. Be sure to follow safe practices and use an appropriate cleaning agent. Public Health Ontario offers more information on [cleaning and disinfection](#) protocols.
- Proper handwashing is key. Use [good hand washing technique](#) and avoid touching your face. Extra handwashing is a good idea for everyone – and when that's not possible, a hand sanitizer with minimum alcohol content of 60% should be used frequently. Disinfect your hands after interacting with co-workers or completing tasks.
- Keep up with the best. Consider regular times to check in with public health updates and retrain/revise practices as needed.
- Ensure that measures you decide on are communicated to workers.
- Screen workers regularly for health issues. If anyone develop symptoms of COVID-19, implement procedures for reporting the illness and keeping the worker away from others. For further guidance on screening procedures, consult the Ministry of Health at:
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_operators_guidance.pdf
- People who are sick or have signs of illness (e.g. fever, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, tiredness, shortness of breath) **must self isolate**, notify their employer and call a doctor or healthcare provider*.

As a last resort, consider Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which is effective only if it's appropriate for the situation and people wear it correctly. Ensure PPE training includes the fit, use, care, putting on and taking off, maintenance, cleaning and limitations of the PPE.

Some examples of PPE that may be suited to lawn care workers would include:

Gloves – gloves can help limit contact with equipment, surfaces etc. Be sure to set up practices for proper removal of gloves and suitable disposal or changing when soiled. It's also important to consider other hazards that may be present in the workplace before introducing gloves. In some cases, gloves can be an 'entanglement' hazard and should not be worn.

Goggles or face shield – can help with barriers and separation too. They should be assigned to people and not shared and can be used regularly if kept clean. Ensure the goggle or face shield use does not result in workers touching their faces more often because of heat or discomfort.

Respiratory protection is not the first line of defence against COVID-19. Please continue to monitor Public Health Ontario for respiratory protection advice.

EVALUATION

COVID-19 has presented challenges workplaces have never encountered before. Keep in mind that any adjustments made today may need readjusting tomorrow. Look at preventative measures on an ongoing basis, and adjust them if they are not working well enough or causing other issues. For example, are people doing what they've been asked to do? If not, what is preventing them from doing so? Can you make adjustments and improve?

For anyone who thinks they may have been exposed to or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, please start by visiting the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website and taking a self-assessment: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>. Please do not visit an assessment centre unless you have been referred by a health care professional. Do not call 911 unless it is an emergency.

* For additional information, refer to Health Canada's website on COVID-19: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html?topic=tilelink>

RESOURCES

Stay updated with daily government updates on COVID-19:

[Government of Ontario](#)
[Government of Canada](#)
[Public Health Ontario](#)

For more information visit www.wsps.ca/COVID19

NOTE: This document is intended for informational purposes only to provide an overview of the potential hazards posed in the workplace due to COVID-19. It is not intended as medical advice, to provide a comprehensive risk assessment for all workplaces, or to replace any legislated workplace safety obligations. Due to the ongoing evolution of the situation in Ontario and around the world, this document may be used as a guide for Employers in addition to guidance delivered by public health authorities such as the [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#), [Ontario Ministry of Health](#), [Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). Any use which is made of this document by any Employer, or any reliance on or decisions to be made based on it, are the responsibility of the Employer. WSPS and its partners, officers, directors, employees, agents, representatives, suppliers and service providers accept no responsibility for any errors or omissions in content or for damages of any kind or nature suffered by any Employer or any third party as a result of use of or reliance on this communication.