

# Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

## Guidance on Health and Safety for Warehousing Sector 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**

A new type of virus, known as COVID-19, is causing an outbreak of respiratory (lung) disease. The severity of this illness can vary from person to person. There are steps you can take to prevent the spread of infection. This document provides information to help you while working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **RECOGNIZE AND ASSESS**

COVID-19 can cause a range of symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat and shortness of breath. These symptoms can appear in a few days or up to 14 days after being exposed to the virus. For some people, the symptoms are like having a cold; for others they may be severe or life-threatening.

The virus is transmitted via droplets during close, unprotected contact with an infected person, or by touching an infected surface and then the mouth, nose, or eyes.

Keeping safe at work involves understanding how employees could come into contact with COVID-19 as they perform their jobs, and then taking steps to minimize contact.

People working as equipment operators, material handlers, office staff, and distribution and operations managers are just some of those in the warehousing sector who need to consider how they can work safely and prevent COVID-19 from spreading.

In addition, employers should advise these workers to complete the online self-assessment or call either:

- Telehealth: 1-866-797-0000
- their primary care provider (for example, family physician)

## CONTROLS

Here are a number of options for protecting food retail 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 and not touching the face. Include temporary workers in the training.
- Control who comes into your operation, with whom they speak, and what they handle. Control activities may include informing, screening and hand washing or sanitizing. Check the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website for screening guidelines.
- Have all employees and visitors wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available, before entering the workplace, after contact with others, or with surfaces others have touched. Be sure to include handwashing before breaks and at shift changes, etc. Be sure to keep an adequate supply of soap, paper towels, etc.
- Sanitize the workplace thoroughly and often, especially frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, screens, scanners, counters, and handrails. Pay particular attention to common areas, such as entryways, washrooms and kitchens.
- Identify activities where people may come into contact with others, and employ ways to minimize contact and maintain physical distance. For example, limit the number of people working in one space so that they can distance themselves. Stagger shifts and break times.
- Have all employees and visitors wash or sanitize their hands before entering the facility, after contact with others or with surfaces others have touched, before breaks, and when they leave.
- Minimize the number of people using each piece of equipment. If possible, assign each lift truck to just one user. Between use, clean truck parts (controls, steering wheels, handrails, etc.) users may have touched.
- Reschedule unnecessary visits by supply chain partners, vendors, service technicians, or others.
- Introduce more fresh air by increasing air intake and opening windows and bay doors. Avoid central recirculation where possible.
- 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.

As a last resort, consider personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE is effective only if appropriate to 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.

Disposable gloves are one example of PPE that can help limit contact with surfaces that may be infected. Implement safe practices for changing gloves, such as if they are torn or dirty and disposing of them.

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

## EVALUATE

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](#)

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 Organization \(WHO\)](#), [Ontario Ministry of Health](#), [Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Centers 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.