

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Health and Safety for Community Garden 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

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 three main 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 and community 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 and the general public (gardeners) 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 and the general public as well, so regular 'check-ins' on how controls are helping is highly recommended.

RECOGNIZE HAZARD/ASSESS RISKS

For community gardeners and employees, we recognize that you will have contact with people including contact with surfaces, such as tools, equipment, machinery and surfaces. 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 and community gardens. 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 community garden workers and the general public from exposure to COVID-19:

- Follow all municipal and local public health warnings, directions and recommendations related to COVID-19.
- Communicate that it is not permitted to enter the site if individuals have symptoms of COVID-19. For example, install clear signage throughout the site.
- Provide direction on how many people should be allowed in garden rows/boxes/areas and the distancing between people.
- Control and limit the number of people in a garden at one time.
- Practice physical distancing (staying 2 metres away from others) during garden activities.
- Where possible, assign staff to specific areas/locations to ensure people are following physical distancing protocols in areas likely to be congested. Restrict access to areas where more than 2 meters of distance cannot be maintained between people.
- Communicate on possible COVID-19 transmission points, what steps are being taken to protect people, and how they can protect themselves, including frequent hand washing or sanitizing, and not touching their face.
- Provide a safe place for individuals to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and personal protective equipment at the gardens.
- Provide waste containers for people to dispose of garden containers, bags and other waste materials.
- Increase cleaning and disinfecting on commonly touched surfaces like taps, baskets, buckets and (water) hose nozzles, tables. Encourage individuals to bring their own gardening supplies and tools. Sharing of various tools to other members of the public should be prohibited.
- Individuals should be sure to follow safe practices and use an appropriate cleaning agent for their tools. Public Health Ontario offers more information on [cleaning and disinfection](#) protocols.
- Gardens should consider supplying portable handwashing stations. 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 other people and completing tasks.
- Consider regular times to check in with public health updates and retrain/revise practices as needed.
- Ensure that measures you decide on are well communicated.

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 workers receive proper PPE training which includes the fit, use, care, putting on and taking off, maintenance, cleaning and limitations of the PPE. Personal protection equipment 'how to' communications can be posted for the general public.

Some examples of PPE that may be suited to Community Gardens 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.

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 defense against COVID-19. Please continue to monitor Public Health Ontario for respiratory protection advice. Monitor guidance from local health units and/or municipalities as they may have additional requirements such as the use of a personal cloth face covering when onsite at community gardens.

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 Organization \(WHO\)](#), [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.