

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Health and Safety for Funeral 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 three main hazards presented by COVID-19.

Things like proper hand hygiene, keeping surfaces and objects clean and physical distancing (staying 2 metres apart) to prevent close contact with potentially infected people 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 funeral workers, we recognize that you will have contact with the public and surfaces, such as equipment, clothing, products and remains, as you go about your work. You could potentially come in contact with droplets as a result of these interactions. COVID-19 can travel in respiratory droplets that are released into the environment by 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

Already existing controls may help to reduce the risk of exposure to workers (e.g. following practices required by the Local/Provincial Health Unit).

To protect yourself from some of these hazards consider the following options:

- Are there tasks you can minimize or eliminate? For example, can transactions be done by e-transfer or online? Can you postpone visitations? Eliminate stylist activities?
- Is there an opportunity to improve fresh air intake/air circulation? Increased airflow can help minimize opportunities for these kinds of hazards to build up.
- Is it possible to control how many people you're interacting with? Physical distancing (staying 2 metres apart) is recommended, so if you can enforce distance between people, it's recommended to do so. Consider limiting visitations to essential people only and spacing out chairs or use tape to mark proper distance between persons, flow of people, or limiting numbers of people admitted to only a few at a time
- Reduce the number of in-person contacts. Eliminate contact greetings such as handshakes and hugs.
- Minimize or eliminate practices by staff and visitors that require physical contact with the deceased.
- Increase the cleaning frequency – on everything from common areas, door handles, switches, tools, furniture and equipment. Be sure to follow safe practices and use an appropriate cleaning agent.
- Consider setting a practice like washing hands and disinfecting surfaces and tools after each interaction.
- Consider job rotation to reduce time in a specific work area and/or to limit workers working too close together in a space.
- Suspend all non-essential services and implement effective sanitation practices between rotations.
- Be sure to keep up with good hand washing and **avoid touching your face**. Extra handwashing is a good idea for everyone – and when that's not possible, a good hand sanitizer should be used frequently.
- Place sanitizer throughout your facility and ask visitors to use it prior to entering the facility and each room and upon exiting. Provide receptacles for disposal of tissues and other waste.
- Keep up with the latest. 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.

If the above recommendations are still not enough for your workplace, as a last resort, consider Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). PPE is only effective if 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 funeral workers work include:

- Gloves – single use gloves can help limit skin contact with surfaces, product etc. Be sure to set up practices for proper removal of gloves and suitable disposal or changing when they are soiled. It's also important to consider other hazards present in the workplace before introducing gloves – in some cases, gloves can be an 'entanglement' hazard and should not be worn.
- Goggles or Face Shields – can help create a barrier and separation too. They should be assigned to individuals and not shared and can be reused 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.

EVALUATION

COVID 19 has presented all of us with challenges we have never seen before. It's important to consider that any of the adjustments we are making today, may need further adjustment tomorrow.

It is recommended that you take a look at your preventative measures on an ongoing basis, and adjust them if they are not working well enough or causing other issues with your work. For example, if you decided to use goggles, but they are fogging up and making other tasks unnecessarily difficult, you may want to try a face shield instead. Or if you decided you needed a certain kind of disinfectant and it's no longer available, switching to good soap and water practices may be a reasonable substitute.

Bottom line? Plan to make regular check-ins part of your COVID 19 prevention plans.

Resources

Stay updated with daily government updates on COVID-19:

[Government of Ontario](#)

[Government of Canada](#)

[Public Health Ontario](#)

[Ministry of Health Guidance for Funeral and Bereavement Services](#)

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.