

Guidance on construction facility hygiene 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.

Recognize hazards and assess risks

How does the coronavirus spread? Coronaviruses are spread mainly from person to person through close contact. For example, in a household, workplace, or health care centre. Some human coronaviruses spread easily between people, while others do not.

Potential exposures for construction workers: On construction sites, workers could be exposed to infectious diseases through the following activities:

- Working in close proximity to others.
- Close contact with others during delivery of material and equipment.
- Exposure to contaminated areas in the cab when using a shared vehicle or piece of operating equipment.
- Touching possibly contaminated items during the course of the work, for example:
 - Tools and equipment
 - Construction materials and supplies
 - Pens when signing for pickups or deliveries
 - Electronic screens on devices like cell phones
 - Common surfaces such as handles on the entry door at facilities

Controls

1. **Maintain physical distancing.** Everyone in Ontario should be practicing physical distancing to reduce their exposure to other people. They should do their best to avoid close contact with people outside of their immediate families. Close contact includes being within two (2) meters (6 feet) of another person.

For more information visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

2. Clean-up facilities. A well-maintained hand-washing facility helps eliminate infectious diseases and keeps workers safe from some of the toxic dusts and chemicals often found on construction sites.

The constructor must provide the following:

- Clean-up facilities equipped with no fewer wash basins than half the number of toilets.
- Hot and cold running water where reasonably possible.
- Either paper towels and waste receptacles or a hand dryer.
- Soap and water or hand sanitizer that can be used without water and paper towels.

Note: Although this is a fact-specific determination to be made by an inspector at a workplace, it is the position of the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development that clean-up facilities complete with hot and cold water (or warm water) are, as a general matter, reasonable to be provided by constructors in almost all construction projects, with the exception of long “mobile” projects, short-duration projects (less than one month), or very geographically remote projects where road access is not possible.

3. Regular Hand Washing. Hand washing helps remove viruses and toxic materials from the skin. This prevents workers from spreading infectious diseases, developing skin reactions and ingesting hazardous chemicals.

- Workers must wash their hands after using the toilet; before eating, drinking, handling food or smoking; after coughing or blowing their nose; after contact with chemical agents.
- If soap and water are not available, apply alcohol-based hand sanitizer and remove visible soiling with paper towel, then reapply alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

4. Toilets. An essential requirement to preventing the spread of germs on construction projects is access to toilets and clean-up facilities.

- Provide (or arrange for) water-flush toilets that are connected to a sanitary sewer, or chemical-flush toilets that are not connected to a sanitary sewer.
- Ensure that minimum numbers of toilets, as prescribed per number of workers regularly employed at the project, are provided. Also, ensure that separate facilities for female workers are provided, unless the facilities are intended to be used by only one worker at a time. (See Tables 1 and 2 for the number of toilets.)
- Ensure that facilities are serviced as often as required.

Table 1: Determining the number of water-flush or non-recirculating chemical-flush toilets.

Number of workers regularly employed at the project	Minimum number of water-flush toilets
1-15	1
16-30	2
31-45	3
46-60	4
61 or more	4, plus 1 additional toilet for each additional group of 15 or fewer workers

Table 2: Determining the number of non-water flush or non-recirculating chemical-flush toilets.

Number of workers regularly employed at the project	Minimum number of non-water-flush toilets
1-10	1
11-20	2
21-30	3
31-40	4

Resource: [Section 28 – 30 of Ontario Regulation 213/91](#) prescribes the requirements for hygiene on construction projects.

41 or more	4, plus 1 additional toilet for each additional group of 15 or fewer workers
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Stay home if you are feeling ill. If you detect symptoms, you should immediately distance yourself from others and go home. If possible, avoid using public transit. Ensure you notify your supervisor so that they are aware of the situation and can also notify others who may have been exposed.

There are no specific treatments for coronaviruses, and there is no vaccine that protects against coronaviruses. Most people with common human coronavirus illnesses will recover on their own. You should:

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Get rest and sleep as much as possible.
- Try a humidifier or a hot shower to help with a sore throat or cough.

Evaluate

Follow-up and evaluation are essential to ensure the effectiveness of controls and solutions implemented. Review your process and identify any opportunities for improvement.

You should determine the following:

- Has the hazard been eliminated or the risk minimized appropriately?
- Is there a better way to control the risk?
- Is the control being used consistently and as planned? Monitor behaviour and practices, and your improvement over time.
- Continuously engage your workers, and communicate recommendations and adjustments with supervisors.

Continuously monitor the necessary tools, supplies, and equipment needed to meet your control measures. Also ensure sufficient supplies are readily available, adequate, and accessible.

If you are concerned that you may have been exposed to COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms, visit the Ministry of Health website and take their self-assessment. Contact your primary care provider or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 if you are experiencing symptoms. Do not visit a COVID-19 assessment centre unless you have symptoms. Do not call 911 unless it is an emergency.

Resources

Stay updated with daily government updates on COVID-19:

[Government of Ontario](#)

[Government of Canada](#)

[Public Health Ontario](#)