

## Guidance on mental health awareness for transport drivers 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* (OHS) 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 OHS 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?** The virus typically spreads through coughing and sneezing, personal contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then your mouth, nose, or eyes.

**Potential mental health exposures for transport drivers.** Drivers normally work long hours and can be away from home for extended periods. With the additional pressure associated with being an essential service to our country's business continuity, there is the risk of additional stress and/or feelings of anxiety generated from the following:

- Pressure to deliver essential goods and services to support the economy during the pandemic.
- Long work hours in an isolated environment.
- Uncertainty of changes with COVID-19.
- Long periods of time away from family and friends.
- Maintaining an unhealthy lifestyle (such as eating non-healthy takeout options).
- Lack of physical exercise.
- Feelings of disrespect from other drivers on the road.
- Changing road and weather conditions.

### Controls

1. **While working.** The following controls can be used to manage your mental health:

For more information visit: [ihsa.ca/COVID-19](https://ihsa.ca/COVID-19)

- Know the facts and ensure that you are receiving up-to-date information from reliable sources (credible news outlets, company management, etc.) and avoid rumours and gossip.
  - Reach out to your network. Social distancing is imperative for reducing the spread of the virus, but can also cause feelings of isolation, depression, and loneliness. During rest stops or while waiting for shipments to be loaded or unloaded, use this opportunity to check in with family and friends.
  - Eat healthy and avoid the temptation to have comfort foods/snacks.
  - Practice self-care while on the road. For example, during your rest breaks, try deep breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, or meditation in your cab.
  - Use your break times to read or listen to something that has nothing to do with COVID-19.
  - Try detoxing from the digital world while on break by avoiding social media.
  - Remind yourself that you are making a difference and helping the economy and people by providing an essential service.
  - Maintain a good following distance of other vehicles and practice defensive driving methods.
  - Ensure you properly plan your trip to avoid potential weather systems, construction zones, etc.
2. **When back at home.** When at home, take some additional measures to relax during these high-stress times before having to return to the road:
    - Get sufficient rest.
    - Spend quality time with your family and loved ones by playing games or doing puzzles.
    - Take walks for fresh air while still practicing social distancing.
    - If you have a pet at home, have some extra cuddle time.
    - Fit in some exercise time to maintain your physical and mental health.
  3. **Personal well-being.** If you feel that you need help, remember that it is ok to ask for it. Check with your company supervisor, provincial programs, or your insurance provider to see what resources are available to you. Many companies have confidential, easy-to-access Employee Assistance Programs.
  4. **Remember to always practise good hygiene.** Health Canada recommends following basic hygiene practices:
    - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
    - If using hand sanitizers, they must be alcohol based (greater than 60% alcohol) to be effective.
    - Sneeze or cough into a tissue and discard it, or into your elbow or sleeve.

## **Evaluate**

Identify what works for you to maintain your mental health and well-being. Continue to communicate with your workplace and family and friends and discuss what may be causing you stress with the goal of making your working conditions the best they can be.

**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.

For Ontario residents, anyone who suspects that they have contracted COVID-19 should call 811 (NOT 911) instead of going to the hospital or a family doctor. Direct toll-free phone numbers for Ontario residents are: 1-866-797-0000 or TTY: 1-866-797-0007. Visit the Ontario Ministry of Health's website and taking their [self-assessment](#).

## **Resources**

Stay updated with daily government updates on COVID-19:

[Government of Ontario](#)

[Government of Canada](#)

[Public Health Ontario](#)