

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Health and Safety for Places of Worship During COVID-19

OVERVIEW

During the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, we all need to do our part to keep workers and the public safe and healthy so we can stop the spread and prepare to reopen the province, when we are ready.

Below is a set of resources, tips and best practices to help employers and workers prevent the spread of COVID-19 and work together to reopen the province.

Employers and workers in Ontario have certain duties and rights under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations. Employers should also review and follow any applicable directives and guidance coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Ministry of Health.

Learn more about:

- [workers' rights](#)
- [employers' responsibilities](#)
- [Duties of Employers and Other Persons](#)

BEST PRACTICES

We know that every workplace is unique which makes it so important that every workplace assesses functions carried out by their workforce to ensure they take action to protect against hazards presented by exposure to COVID-19.

Practicing physical distancing (staying at least 2 metres away from others), minimizing contact with droplets of mucous or saliva, keeping hands, surfaces and objects clean, and preventing 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 recommendations 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. Employers should consult with Joint Health and Safety Committees/Health and Safety Representatives on measures to protect workers in the workplace.

Some workplaces may already have some existing controls in place that may help reduce the risk of exposure to workers, so regular 'check-ins' on the effectiveness of controls is highly recommended.

RECOGNIZE HAZARDS/ASSESS RISKS

For Religious leaders and staff, we recognize that the nature of the services you provide could require close contact with your visitors and congregation (i.e. less than 2 metres). These interactions as well as the need to touch surfaces and equipment could increase the likelihood that you could come in contact with the virus.

Take a look at where you might minimize those risks within your place of worship. Workers who are sick or have signs of illness (e.g. fever, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, tiredness, shortness of breath) should self-isolate. Consult [public health information](#) to learn more about the symptoms of COVID-19 infection Recognize and report these hazards and use appropriate controls. Ensure that you and your staff stay home if you or they have symptoms.

Take a look at the controls below to see how they may assist you.

CONTROLS

All existing safety, sanitation, and infection control standards established by licensing agencies and public health authorities are still in effect and enforced. Already existing controls may help to reduce the risk of exposure to staff (e.g. following practices required by the Local/Provincial Health Unit).

To protect from some of the risks of exposure to COVID-19, consider the following:

Keep Informed and Communicate

- Screen visitors and staff regularly for health issues. This may include reminders to customers on websites and via telephone messages. If anyone develops symptoms of COVID-19, implement procedures for reporting the illness and keeping the worker away from others. For further guidance on screening procedures, consult the [Ministry of Health](#).
- Ensure that illness reporting requirements are well communicated to staff. Workers who are sick or have signs of illness (e.g. fever, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, tiredness, shortness of breath) must self-isolate
- Leaders are to follow all municipal and local public health recommendations related to COVID-19.
- Regularly check in with public health updates and retrain/revise practices as needed.
- Learn about innovative approaches that other leaders are using to continue services that follow public health directions and recommendations.
- Ensure staff are trained on possible COVID-19 transmission points in the place of worship, what steps are being taken to protect them, and how they can protect themselves, including frequent hand washing especially before and after each service, sanitizing items and surfaces more frequently, and not touching their face.
- Consider how to communicate your health and hygiene practices and protocols to your congregation and community

Eliminate or Minimize Exposure

Physical Distancing

- Provide work from home options, when possible, to reduce number and duration of contacts.
- In shared spaces, consider measures such as staggered shifts and virtual meetings as much as possible.
- Communicate to staff, to refrain from socializing or congregating outside of the facility when returning to their vehicles or homes in order to adhere to physical distancing guidelines.
- Consider whether the use of barriers is necessary to protect staff and visitors (For example, installation of hard, clear plastic barriers where physical distance cannot be maintained)
- Maintain a single point of entry to the place of worship and a separate point of exit. Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or walkways and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and congregants remain physically distanced apart while moving in spaces such as hallways.

Disinfection and Sanitizing

- Develop and implement procedures for staff to ensure the regular and frequent cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch/shared surfaces and objects such as: doorknobs, seating areas, tables, light switches, railings, washrooms etc.
- Provide hand sanitizer and/or sanitizing wipes where staff gathers. Consider having them available near the entrance.
- Provide a safe place for individuals to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and protective equipment. Empty and clean waste containers on a regular basis.
- Consider how lunch, coffee break and other high touch or high traffic common areas will be addressed

Hand Hygiene

- 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 co-workers, customers or completing tasks. Keep an adequate supply of soap, paper towels, etc.
- Encourage staff/volunteers and congregants to [wash their hands](#) before entering the premises, after contact with others, or with surfaces others have touched. Be sure to include handwashing before and after service. Be sure to keep an adequate supply of soap, paper towels, etc.

Other Control Measures

- Where appropriate, consider using outdoor spaces.
- Ventilate spaces by opening doors, windows etc.

In addition to the above recommendations, your workplace should consider protective equipment. Equipment is only effective if people understand its limitations and wear it correctly. Workers need to be trained in the fit, use, storage, cleaning, maintenance and limitations of the protective equipment that they wear. Workers must use protective equipment as required by their employer.

If physical distance and separation cannot be maintained, workers should have protective equipment consisting of surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (goggles or face shield).

EVALUATION

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 impeding your vision, or are 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 that is no longer available, identifying alternative disinfecting products or solutions or switching to good soap and water practices may be reasonable substitutes.

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

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 website and taking a [self-assessment](#). Please do not visit an assessment center unless you have been referred by a health care professional. Do not call 911 unless it is an emergency.

RESOURCES

Stay updated with daily government updates:

- [Government of Ontario](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)

Ontario government and agency-issued resources about COVID-19

The [Ontario Ministry of Health](#) is providing consistent updates on the provincial government’s response to the outbreak, including:

- status of cases in Ontario
- current affected areas
- symptoms and treatments
- how to protect yourself and self-isolate
- updated Ontario news on the virus

[Public Health Ontario](#) is providing up-to-date resources on COVID-19, including:

- links to evolving public health guidelines, position statements and situational updates
- synopsis of key articles updating on the latest findings related to the virus
- recommendations for use of personal protective equipment
- information on infection prevention and control
- testing information
- other public resources

The Ontario government is supporting employers by setting up a portal to assist them in finding supplies and equipment through the [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#).

Other COVID-19 resources

[Health Canada](#) outlines the actions being taken by the Government of Canada to limit spread of the virus, as well as what is happening in provinces and communities across the country. It also maintains a live update of the number of cases by province.

The [World Health Organization](#) is updating the latest guidance and information related to the global outbreak and spread beyond Canadian borders.

It also provides the most up-to-date information on:

- current research and development around the virus
- a COVID-19 situation “dashboard”
- emergency preparedness measures
- live media updates on the spread of the virus

This resource does not replace the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations, and should not be used as or considered legal advice. Health and safety inspectors apply the law based on the facts in the workplace.

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 [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.