

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

Guidance on Home Cleaning and Maintenance Services (Residential) During COVID-19

OVERVIEW

During the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, we all need to do our part to keep workers, customers 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 employees 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 assess functions carried out by their workforce to ensure they take action to protect against the hazards presented by exposure to COVID-19.

Practicing physical distancing (staying 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 AND ASSESS RISK

Residential home cleaning and maintenance can include cleaners, appliance repair workers, maintenance personnel and others that require access to the interior of personal residences. It is recognized that the nature of the work completed within this sector can require activities in customer homes, contact between co-workers and customers. These interactions, as well as the need to touch work surfaces and equipment could increase the likelihood that you or your customers could come in contact with the COVID-19 virus.

Home cleaners and maintenance workers do come into contact with customers and surfaces including linens, money, furniture, fixtures, supplies and equipment as you go about your work. Workers could potentially come in contact with respiratory droplets from these interactions. 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. Employers should ensure that you and your co-workers stay home if you or they have symptoms.

Review the controls below to see how they may assist you in protecting you and co-workers from exposure to COVID-19.

CONTROLS

All existing safety, sanitation, and infection control standards established by licensing agencies and public health authorities are still in effect.

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

Keep Informed and Communicate

- Follow all federal, provincial, municipal and local public health warnings, directions and recommendations related to COVID-19.
- Screen customers prior to interaction with workers and monitor workers 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](#).
- Update the business's voicemail, email, social media, website and other external communications to reflect current business practices in place during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Train everyone on possible COVID-19 transmission points, what steps are being taken to protect them, and how they can protect themselves, including frequent hand washing or hand sanitizing, and not touching their face.
- Consider regular times to check in with public health updates and retrain/revise workplace practices as needed.
- Ensure that measures you decide on are well communicated to workers.
- Confirm appointments before arrival. Consider eliminating restrictions and penalties on cancellations to encourage customers to reschedule visits to their homes if they are feeling unwell.
- Arrange for the customer to leave the residence or isolate themselves outside the area to be cleaned or maintained while workers are in the residence.

Eliminate or Minimize Exposure

Physical Distancing

- Integrate physical distancing in job activities. If the client is home, maintain a distance of at least 2 metres during interactions. Control and reduce how many people you're interacting with at once. Physical distancing requires fewer persons within an enclosed space.
- Minimize the amount of time that you spend at the site. If working with other workers, avoid doing tasks in the same room at the same time to maintain physical distancing.

Hand Hygiene

- 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 co-workers or completing tasks. Be sure to keep an adequate supply of soap, paper towels, etc.
- Encourage workers to [wash their hands](#) or apply hand sanitizer regularly and before entering the workplace or after contact with surfaces others have touched. Be sure to encourage handwashing before breaks, between visits, etc.

Disinfection and Sanitizing

- Limit the number of people sharing equipment or tools (for example, vacuum cleaners, mops, rags, brushes, etc.). If possible, assign each employee a personal set of tools for their use only. If not practical, thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment prior to taking it to the next site. In the event customer owned equipment or materials need to be used, disinfect all items prior to and after use. Where applicable, empty vacuum canister, change filters, change vacuum bags, etc. to minimize potential for contamination.

- Minimize or eliminate tasks that disturb surface dust and particulate. To do so, consider vacuuming instead of sweeping and wet wipe instead of dry dust.
- Thoroughly disinfect or replace all used cleaning cloths, sponges and mop heads between sites.
- For any soiled towels, sheets, uniforms, laundry etc., minimize shaking and disturbance; if possible, arrange to ensure the laundering of items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely. Clean and disinfect hampers or other carts for transporting laundry and sanitation equipment.
- Visibly dirty surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water before disinfection. Be sure to use appropriate cleaner and disinfectants for the job and follow safe use practices as indicated on the Safety Data Sheets. Public Health Ontario offers more information on [cleaning and disinfection](#) protocols.
- Ensure the cleaning regimen includes specific attention to commonly touched surfaces like door knobs (both sides), counters, hand rails, telephones, electronic equipment touch points and equipment.

Other Control Measures

- Minimize or eliminate handling of cash, offer contactless payment options such as over the phone, electronic money transfer, tap, credit and debit. If a debit machine is used, apply a replaceable covering or sanitize the device after each use.
- Avoid sharing business vehicles. If it is necessary to transport passengers, consider installing transparent physical barrier(s) that does not impede field of vision between driver and any passengers. For shared vehicles, increase the cleaning frequency of the vehicle interior and exterior commonly touched surfaces including vehicle door handles and frames, windows and controls, clear hard plastic barriers, keys, seatbelt buckles, steering wheel, gearshift, signal levers, ventilation and radio controls.
- Improve fresh air intake/air circulation with open doors and windows. Recommend proper maintenance of the home air handling system.
- Minimize contact with customer pets (e.g. dogs, cats). Have owners separate animals from workers.
- Customers/clients may be asked to wear a face covering (non-medical or cloth mask) to protect those around them.

Where workers are exposed to hazards that cannot be controlled through other measures, consider Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which is effective only if it's appropriate for the situation and people wear it correctly. Ensure PPE training includes the fit, use, care, putting on and taking off PPE, maintenance, cleaning and limitations of the PPE.

Respiratory protection is not the first line of defense against COVID-19. Please continue to monitor Public Health Ontario for respiratory protection advice relevant to the use by workers in your workplace.

EVALUATE

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](#). 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](#).

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.