

COVID-19: How to protect workers and keep job sites safe

At PCA, the safety of our members and workers is the priority during these extraordinary times. We are committed to ensuring that you have the support, guidance and resources you need in order to adhere to public health protocols, understand your rights and responsibilities and keep your offices and job sites open and safe for all workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Construction Impacts and Recommendations

First, it is imperative that all employers have COVID-19 policies that are posted and communicated to all employees and contractors/trades. This includes how the site will operate, how employees and contractors report illnesses, how physical distancing is enforced, how work is scheduled, and how hygiene practices are improved.

Communication is key, and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities is critical.

General On-Site Best Practices

Physical Distancing:

- Public health officials have advised that physical distancing is essential in controlling the spread of COVID-19 and protecting public health. In order to ensure physical distancing on site, employers should consider:
 - ✓ Staggered start times
 - ✓ Staggered breaks
- In addition, if physical distancing is not possible or where workers have frequent or close contact with the others, a policy to use either medical or non-medical masks may offer some source control

Personal Hygiene:

- ✓ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- ✓ Cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue and wash your hands afterwards
- ✓ Masks can be worn for the purpose of source control, protecting others in close proximity to the wearer by preventing the spread of bacteria and viruses to others.
- ✓ Avoid commonly touched areas including handrails, public transit poles or ensure you clean your hands after
- ✓ Open doors and touch elevator buttons with gloves, the back of your hand, or other body part or activate the wheelchair accessibility button with the back of your hand, elbow, or knee if possible
- ✓ Wash your clothes as soon as you get home
- ✓ Notify your supervisor immediately if you are sick and contact public health.

On-site Sanitation:

- On-site personal hygiene is paramount. We strongly urge employers to focus on the following:
 - ✓ Provide workers with information on best practices for sanitizing hands.
 - ✓ Establish protocols for frequent cleaning of commonly touched surfaces or areas (hoists / site-trailers / door handles / equipment).
 - ✓ Limit unnecessary on-site contact between workers as well as with outside service providers.
 - ✓ Encourage physical distancing of six feet between workers.
 - ✓ Set limits on physical distancing (i.e.: remove coffee trucks from site).

Adjust On-Site and Production Schedules:

- In order to keep job sites open and safe, production schedules will have to adjust accordingly to accommodate physical distancing. This requires collaboration between owners and trades to ensure there is a clear understanding of how production will be impacted.
- Schedules should consider:
 - ✓ Need for physical distancing including staggered work schedules and breaks
 - ✓ Site and workspace sanitation
 - ✓ Reduction of workers (i.e. in low-rise do not schedule multiple crews in the same unit)
 - ✓ Work-site mobility and transportation including hoist operations
 - ✓ Total number of people on-site and where they are assigned to work

Track and Monitor your workforce:

It may take several days for COVID-19 symptoms to develop. That is why it is important to note when workers report an illness as well as the areas and people they have been in contact with. In the case of a positive test, public health officials will ask employers to provide these details along with contact information for anyone who may have been exposed. The better employers track information, the better public health is able to respond.

- Employers must report occupation illnesses including COVID-19 to:
 - ✓ the Ministry of Health (in writing)
 - ✓ the joint health and safety representative
 - ✓ the union (where applicable)

Specific Considerations for Best Practices

SITES:

Site Access:

- Post signs at all site entrances that say, “Site Sign in/out by texting <person>_____ at <phone number>_____”.

- Site supervisor to update sign-in log regularly throughout the day to know who is at site.
- All site orientations to be done verbally without signature, no transfer of papers whenever possible.

Site Meetings:

- Job toolbox meetings to be held outside, with appropriate physical distancing or have people call in. No signatures or transfer of documents. Site Supervisor signs on behalf of employees.
- When arranging necessary inspections from consultants or authorities having jurisdiction, indicate to them they will not be allowed to visit your site if they are showing any signs of being sick.
- Consider conference / skype calls to reduce the number of attendees
- All non-essential events are canceled or postponed (e.g. site barbeques)
- **Maximum capacity in spaces based on provincial regulations in line with physical distancing requirements.**

Examples and exceptions:

- Tradespeople working in teams to do work (Carpenter and Apprentice) must know each other well enough to be sure of the proximity risk of working together.
- For larger groups working together (concrete placement crews) who cannot manage physical distancing to do their work: must have a conversation with the Safety Advisor and the Project Team to ensure they can proceed with the work safely.
- Individuals should utilize technologies available to them such as email, text, and teleconferencing to minimize direct contact with others.
- The number of people allowed in the hoist at the same time should be reduced to avoid crowding.
- Project teams should stagger break and lunch schedules to minimize the number of people near one another.
- Project teams may also consider staggering start / finish times aimed at reducing large group wait times at the gates etc.
- Meetings should be held in the area where an individual works, instead of a large gathering point.
- For all remaining in-person gatherings, and in-work environments in general, participants should exercise recommended practices for reducing the risk of transmission as identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Canada, and the World Health Organization.

Jobsite Sanitation Measures:

- As hand sanitizer is becoming a scarce commodity, Contractors are making immediate arrangements to construct temporary sinks / handwash areas with hand soap, paper towels and garbage cans. The locations should be at various high-traffic locations.

- Each subcontractor should be responsible for providing hand sanitizer for their workers' needs.
- Each subcontractor remains responsible for cleanliness in their lunchrooms.
- Each subcontractor remains responsible to provide PPE, noting that glove use may be mandatory.
- Each subcontractor is responsible for disinfecting shared tools, iPads, etc. between uses.

Other Options to Consider:

- Only one driver per vehicle or sanitize between drivers.
- Car pooling is NOT acceptable unless workers live in the same household
- Use only your own tools or sanitize between operators.
- At breaks maintain physical distance: easy reference two arm lengths (1 metre).
- Eat lunch alone, where possible in your vehicle, respecting physical distance.
- Workers who take public transit must sanitize their hands prior to starting work.

Safety Certificates:

- Ensure that you have all necessary staff and backup staff compliant for the next 6 months. There is no suggestion that rules around fall protection or first aid etc. are going to be altered.
- Certifications in general could become harder to obtain – get up to date now

Training on Tools:

- Some sites are already experiencing 20-50% loss of manpower. Check your crews to ensure you can still safely operate equipment and maintain workflow.

Shifts:

- Consider adjusting shifts to accommodate reduced density of crews and rotate availability of workers who may have challenges to manage children that are now not in school or daycare.

OFFICE:

Physical Distancing:

- If possible, have a work from home strategy, move desks apart, sanitize your office regularly.
- Larger organizations have split their office staff between home and office. This allows distancing in the office by reducing density and allows the ability to switch out people if someone gets sick.

External Workers:

- Do not allow delivery people in your office unless they can confirm that they are in good health. Have them complete a statement confirming this, before allowing them access to your premises.

Work from Home: Security:

- Working from home brings risks to your organization. Workers must respect strict security rules to ensure they do not introduce viruses to your software system. With many homes having children/teenagers, it is imperative that workers log out from your software system **every time** they leave their computer.
- The risk of phishing or other attacks is on the increase as hackers are literally seeking to exploit the situation.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Responding to a suspected COVID-19 exposure, Workplace responsibilities for the employer in the construction industry

Overview

- 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.
- 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 and assess hazards

- Review your COVID-19 protocols before an incident happens. Make sure your procedures clearly state that if employees are not well or experiencing any symptoms, they must stay at home and self-isolate to prevent exposure or risk to other employees and the general public. Ensure your policy has established appropriate response protocols that can be followed.

Identify controls

- Plan to prevent the potential transmission of the virus between workers.
- Have washroom facilities available for all workers to wash their hands.
- Plan work and work crews to facilitate physical distancing where possible and use PPE where distancing might not be practical.
- Upon learning of a suspected case of COVID-19, you should ensure the supervisor has implemented the protocols for responding to the situation.
- As the employer, you and the constructor both share responsibilities to protect workers on a project and should work together.

To this end, the response should include the following measures:

- Ensure that the supervisor is aware of and understands workplace policy and protocols that should be implemented on-site regarding COVID-19 such as:
 - ✓ Ensure the supervisor has requested that the worker with suspected COVID-19 leave the workplace immediately, return home, self-isolate as recommended by public health officials, and seek medical advice.
 - ✓ Advise the worker of any assistance available for workers in self-isolation.
 - ✓ Advise your supervisor about how and what they may say to workers who may have come into contact with the suspected case, taking into consideration confidentiality issues. You may seek guidance on this matter from independent legal counsel and your local public health unit.
 - ✓ Have the supervisor conduct a risk assessment for workers who have worked closely with the potentially affected employee. Supervisors should be encouraged to enable workers who may have been exposed to take precautions to protect themselves as appropriate by watching for symptoms and possibly by removing themselves from the workplace for at least 14 days or until COVID-19 is ruled out. Determining if these other workers were exposed is dependent on the circumstances of the work process and interactions with the potentially affected employee. When the exposed workers are not direct employees, this will require communicating with the constructor and other employers.
 - ✓ Ask that the supervisor identify locations where the potentially affected worker had recently been and determine how to address decontamination. Advise other potentially affected workplace parties, and close off potentially infected areas. Inform the constructor of areas of common use. Take steps to ensure the cleanliness of the workplace where this worker was working.
 - ✓ Identify tools and equipment that the potentially affected worker had recently been using and determine how to address decontamination. Ensure other workers do not use these tools until they have been sanitized. Isolate the tools until cleaned.
- Your protocol for COVID-19 should identify who will be responsible to arrange and oversee any cleaning of tools or surfaces with which the affected worker came in contact.
- If you are notified by public health of a positive COVID result, support and provide information to public health officials to enable the contact tracing process.
- Fulfill Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development reporting requirements for infectious disease.

Evaluate

- Review your protocols on a regular basis. Ensure your supervisor and the workers are aware of their responsibilities to identify, report, and manage suspected cases of exposure to COVID-19.
- Reinforce your protocols if you find knowledge is lacking on the processes you have put into place.
- Look for opportunities to improve your policies or procedures/protocols by continuing to follow advice of Public Health officials in your area.
- Ensure the worker is aware of their responsibility to self-isolate and seek clinical assessment, either through Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000) or by calling their primary care provider.
- If additional assessment is needed, their primary care provider or Telehealth may direct them to receive in-person care options.
- 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.
- Keep in contact with the worker about their health and ask to share any test results they have regarding confirmation of COVID-19. You may need to share the confirmation of COVID-19 with other workers that were sent home due to this exposure or, if permitted by health officials, inform the other workers they can end their self-isolation.

What to do with a Confirmed COVID-19 Case:

- The projections show that 30-70% of the population may ultimately get the virus. All the measures being implemented are to slow the spread to ensure the medical system has the capacity to treat those who need it when they get it.
- In the event of a confirmed case - notify the appropriate parties by email as soon as it is confirmed. It is important to communicate well through this so you will be the first to know.
- Follow the guidelines provided by your Provincial Health Services.

Other Important Business Considerations:

- We must work together to ensure job sites remain open. Strong leadership is required in order to comply with government mandates.
- Now is the time to review your active contracts to ensure you understand payment terms and what could impact them.
- Understand your insurance coverage.
- Ensure that you understand the HR implications of any layoffs or absenteeism that may result from this situation.
- Have a process in place should any short-term site shutdown occur.
- Preplan your orderly exit if an order is issued today to close one or many sites.
- If an inspector is required to sign off on your work, ensure they have an option in place in case they are unable to complete their inspections.

The symptoms of COVID-19 may be like other illnesses, including the cold and flu. Currently, it is recommended that any worker who is experiencing any symptoms should be sent home. In addition, employers should advise all workers experiencing symptoms to complete the self assessment [here](#), or CALL your local public health unit or your family physician.

Public Health is the leading authority for all issues related to COVID-19. These are the only officials who can provide detailed instructions to employees and employers.

Covid-19 Government Announcements:

All levels of government are issuing announcements daily. To stay updated, visit the following official links:

- [Government of British Columbia](#)
- [Government of Alberta](#)
- [Government of Saskatchewan](#)
- [Government of Manitoba](#)
- [Government of Ontario](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)

Additional Safety Resources and Guidelines:

- [World Health Organization](#)
- [B.C. Centre for Disease Control](#)
- [Centre for Disease Control](#)
- [Worldometers](#)
- Mask Guidelines (Ontario) <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/ipac/report-covid-19-masking-source-control-workers-non-healthcare-settings.pdf?la=en>

At PCA, we are here to guide and support you through the COVID-19 pandemic. As new, relevant information becomes available, we will keep you up to date as regulations and protocols that impact you, evolve.

This document is designed to provide general information and resources to member companies of the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA) and their employees. Information provided in this document is not intended to replace professional or legal advice. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this publication, it is not intended to provide legal advice as individual situations will differ and should be discussed with an expert and/or lawyer. PCA makes no warranties, guaranties, or undertakings as to results that may be obtained from information contained in this document.

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