

Public Health Principles for Living with COVID-19 and Protecting the Most Vulnerable Citizens

Recommendations FOR COMMUNITY & WORKPLACES

Last Updated: June 10, 2022

Background

The following voluntary recommendations are public health principles intended to protect everyone, including our most vulnerable from diseases that can be spread from one person to another.

Key Considerations

- The COVID-19 virus continues to circulate in our community.
- Evidence of the return of other serious respiratory viruses such as influenza and RSV has been shown beginning in the fall of 2021.
- We have a shared responsibility to protect the most vulnerable from severe illness and death due to COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. This includes protecting older adults and immune-compromised individuals.
- We have a collective responsibility to respect one another and the personal decisions we make to protect our own health.
- Vaccination is our strongest defence against COVID-19 and influenza. As such, vaccination policies should be maintained as a protective strategy to safeguard workplace health and safety. In addition, employees should be encouraged to [stay up-to-date](#) with COVID-19 booster doses, including fourth doses if eligible. See the [COVID-19 Third Dose and Booster Dose Recommendations](#) for Ontarians.
- All Ontarians 6 months of age and older should receive a flu shot when it becomes available each fall.

Safety Plans

- Safety plans remain a good strategy to ensure employers meet their obligation to protect employee health and safety. Information on how to create a safety plan is [found on the Ontario website](#).

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Screening Employees and Patrons

- Neither active nor passive screening of patrons or employees is required. However, passive screening encourages employees to stay home if they are sick or experiencing symptoms of a respiratory virus. This means having workplace illness policies and signage for clients and customers reminding them to not enter if unwell.

Face Coverings/Masks Recommended in some Circumstances

- Employees who wish to wear a mask to protect their health should be allowed to do so.
- Masking is encouraged indoors based on the setting and situation, such as when there is more COVID-19 circulating in the community, crowded settings, and/or when there are people at higher risk of complications present.
- During times of increased transmission of Covid-19 or influenza masking policies should be considered in settings with a higher proportion of vulnerable people at risk of COVID-19 in the context of community spread. This may include healthcare settings where older adults live, congregate and/or recreate, such as long-term care homes, retirement homes, seniors' centres and/or churches/places of worship.
- Public Health Ontario recommends a respirator (KN95) or a well-fitted medical mask to protect against COVID-19. The Public Health Agency of Canada states that some high-quality, three-layer non-medical masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Proper mask fit determines effectiveness. Learn more about [types of masks and respirators](#)

Ensuring Employees Stay Home When Sick or with Symptoms of COVID-19

- Employees should not come to work if they have:
 - [Symptoms of a respiratory virus](#)
 - Tested positive for COVID-19 (on a Rapid Antigen or PCR test)
- You can learn more about self-isolation requirements for Covid-19 at www.ontario.ca/exposed
- Have a clear procedure for employees to notify a supervisor/manager if they can't attend work.
- Maintain flexible policies so employees can self-isolate or work from home (if feasible) when necessary.

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- If an employee becomes ill with a respiratory virus while at work, employees should follow their workplace policy and/or safety plan to avoid exposing others.
- View our [Guidance on Rapid Antigen Test Use](#) for more information on the appropriate use of COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Tests when symptomatic.
- If an employee or someone in their household has symptoms or they have become a contact of a case of COVID-19 direct them to www.swpublichealth.ca/covid19 or our [Symptoms or Exposure to COVID-19 factsheet](#)

Support Working from home and Outdoor Gatherings Where Feasible

- Supporting employees to work from home may reduce employee absenteeism.
- Gathering outdoors is generally safer than gathering indoors and should be considered for meetings and events where possible.