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SAFE RETURN TO BUSINESS

A Public Health Toolkit for the
Windsor-Essex Business Community

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GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESSES & WORKPLACES

COVID-19 has drastically disrupted activities of daily living for the public, workplaces, and businesses. As the province allows more businesses and workplaces to reopen, it is critical for employers to take the necessary precautions to maintain a safe environment to protect the health and safety of their employees, customers, and the general public. Employers have the greatest responsibility under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) with respect to health and safety in the workplace; however, all parties have a role to play. The measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should be done in compliance with requirements under the OHSA, its associated regulations, and public health directives issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Any worker concerned about their health and safety, including those related to COVID-19, should bring it to the attention of either their supervisor, joint health and safety committee, or health and safety representative. Taking these steps will help to ensure that the employer and the employee have taken all reasonable precautions to ensure health and safety requirements are met in the workplace.

The 'Safe Return to Business: A Public Health Toolkit for the Windsor-Essex Business Community' provides guidelines, best practices, and resources for businesses and workplaces in the Windsor-Essex community. The purpose of this document is to help businesses and workplaces incorporate pandemic planning and preparedness into reopening in a manner that prioritizes the health and safety of business owners, employees, customers, and the community. The following are six main guidelines developed from reviewing several key federal and provincial resources, and are applicable to the various Windsor-Essex County businesses and workplaces across all sectors that remain open or are preparing to reopen.

1. Assess the risk for employees and customers

Employers must conduct an assessment of their workplace to determine possible areas that could contribute to the risk of transmission of COVID-19. The Government of Canada's '[Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)' provides more detailed information about identifying risk and implementing risk mitigation strategies. This process should involve employees, staff, supervisors, business owners, and if present, joint health and safety representatives. Even after opening, it is important that businesses continue to explore ways to make sure any potential risks are mitigated or minimized on a day-to-day basis. The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, in partnership with other health and safety organizations, have also developed [sector-specific guidance](#) with additional considerations unique to the context of each business or workplace. To understand the risk at your workplace, as a minimum, it is important to consider the following questions. Of course, depending on the size, nature, and resources of your business, not all sections or questions will apply.

Planning

- Does your workplace/business have a pandemic preparedness plan?
- Do you have a risk communication plan to share information with your employees, contractors, and clients?

Policies and Practices

- Can your workplace/business support flexible workplace policies (e.g., teleworking arrangements, staggered hours)?
- Where do people gather, such as break rooms, production lines, or meeting rooms? Is there a way of ensuring physical distancing in these environments?
- Does your workplace/business offer, or know how to link, your employees to mental health promotion or support services?

Demographics of Your Workforce and Customers/Clients

- Do you know if some of your employees/clients are from demographic groups at greater risk of severe disease, such as those 70 or older, or people with underlying medical conditions?
- Are your clients at greater risk of spreading the disease (e.g., young children)?

Environment and Workplace Setting

- Consider the type of service your workplace/business provides (e.g., customer service, food service, manufacturing, hoteling, rideshare)?
- Will employees/clients be participating in activities that promote transmission?
- In what setting is your workplace/business located (e.g., a community-setting, large public space, office)?
- Is the majority of the work or services carried out indoors, outdoors or both?
- Can your workplace/business infrastructure be easily altered or modified to implement public health and infection prevention and control measures (e.g., additional hand cleaning stations, spatial separation of 2-metre between workstations)?
- How do clients/customers/contractors primarily access your workplace/business (e.g., by public transit or personal vehicle)?
- Are there restricted points of entry and exit that force people to be in close proximity and/or pass through high-touch areas (e.g. turnstiles, fingerprint entry, doors, elevators)?

Environmental Cleaning

- Does your workplace have existing environmental cleaning procedures and protocols? Can they be enhanced to align with public health advice?
- What surfaces are touched often (e.g., doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches, equipment, shared tools)? What is the plan to clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces frequently?



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Occupational Health and Safety

- What job tasks or processes require workers to come into close proximity with one another or members of the public?
- What tools, machinery, and equipment are commonly used during the course of their work?
- Do your employees have access to Occupational Health and Safety services on site? How will symptomatic individuals in the workplace/business setting be managed? How will close contacts be managed?
- Have you or an Occupational Health and Safety member assessed risk associated with employee interactions with the public?
- Have you or an Occupational Health and Safety member assessed the risk of employees interacting directly with spaces occupied by the general public?

The Public Services Health & Safety Association (PSHSA) [Readiness Assessment](#) is a self-administered questionnaire that may also help businesses assess how prepared they are to safely reopen and sustainably resume operations in the workplace during COVID-19.

2. Reduce the risk of spread

Employers and employees have a responsibility to implement and follow the necessary precautions to limit the risk of COVID-19 spread in businesses and workplaces. Measures like, having all employees self screen prior to coming to work, requiring employees to stay home when they are sick, reducing exposure through alternate work arrangements, or using virtual methods of communication can be most effective. Installing physical barriers and implementing proper cleaning and disinfection strategies at logical intervals are also key steps in reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection or spread. Practicing physical distancing, proper infection control practices (e.g., like hand washing and sanitizing), as well as promoting cough and sneeze etiquette are also key strategies to reduce the spread of infections. Wearing personal protective equipment is required mostly in situations when the other solutions (e.g., physical distancing) are not possible or practical. However, recent recommendations suggest that individuals should wear properly made and fitted cloth masks to help prevent them from potentially spreading their germs to others, when more effective strategies like eliminating exposure or physical distancing can not be achieved.

Consider Options for Working Differently

Depending on the nature of the business or workplace, there may be alternative options to implement flexible work arrangements such as:

- Permitting remote work from home or flexible hours.
- Staggering start times, breaks, lunches, or shifts to limit the number of people in the work space at any given time.

- Using telephone, virtual meetings, or other internet-based platforms to conduct business and meetings, including appointments.
- Holding meetings (when absolutely necessary) in large indoor spaces or large meeting rooms to ensure physical distancing. If no large indoor spaces are available, holding meetings outside may also be an option if there is a safe space and weather permits.

For employees that are unable to work remotely from home, they should be encouraged to complete the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#) prior to reporting for work and instructed to stay at home when feeling sick.

Modify Customer Interactions

For businesses or workplace that regularly interact with clients or customers, it is important that employers take the necessary steps to modify customer interactions to limit the risk of spread of COVID-19 between employees and customers. Employers should consider implementing cashless and no-touch transactions as well as physical barriers such as Plexiglas dividers or roped off areas to create separation between employees and customers to limit physical interactions. Other strategies such as drive through or curbside pick-up should be initiated or continued as well.

Environmental Cleaning & Disinfectant Procedures

Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are part of a broad approach to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. The use of disinfectants with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) is recommended to limit the spread of COVID-19. A DIN is an 8-digit number located on the package or bottle of disinfectant and this indicates that it has been approved for use by Health Canada. Health Canada has created [list of approved hand sanitizers and disinfectants](#) that prevent the spread of COVID-19.

According to Public Health Ontario's [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#), frequently touched surfaces are more likely to be contaminated and it is therefore important to ensure thorough cleaning at least twice a day or when visibly dirty. Each workplace should determine their high touch areas, but here are some of the more common high-touch surfaces to consider as a starting point:

- Handles/door knobs
- Railings/grab bars
- Desk tops
- Telephones/cell phones
- Taps
- Toilet handles
- Kitchen appliances and surfaces
- Water fountains
- Hand sanitizer dispensers



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- Computers keyboards and mouse
- Light switches
- Cash registers
- Touchpad surfaces
- Elevator buttons

Wherever possible, use a pre-mixed solution of cleaner and disinfectant. Ensure that you check the expiry date when using any cleaning or disinfectant products or mixtures and:

- Wear gloves and any other personal protective equipment (PPE) as recommended by the manufacturer
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for preparing the solution and allow adequate contact time for disinfectant to kill germs
- Refer to your workplace for additional specific protocols for the cleaning and disinfection of other surfaces, areas, or materials related to COVID-19.

Promoting Proper Hand Hygiene Practices and Cough and Sneeze Etiquette

Businesses and workplaces must promote and support proper hand hygiene as well as cough and sneeze etiquette to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by:

- Ensuring there are enough supplies available for proper hand hygiene, including pump soap, warm running water and paper towels or hot air dryers.
- Reminding employees and customers to practice cough and sneeze etiquette by covering their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and to place the tissue directly into the garbage. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into the upper sleeve or elbow and avoid sneezing directly into hands.
- Following a sneeze or a cough, it is important to wash hands with soap and water for at least 15-20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be used.
- Including alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations at prominent locations throughout the workplace to supplement hand washing. Portable hand sanitizer bottles should also be provided to workers at their work stations if they interact directly with customers. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers should contain at least 60% alcohol.
- Requiring workers should conduct hand hygiene between every interaction with customers.
- Encouraging customers to sanitize hands upon entry and exit of the workplace and limit handling of products to just those they need.
- Posting signage to remind employees and customers about the importance of properly washing or sanitizing your hands at appropriate intervals.

Maintaining Physical Distance

Physical distancing is an effective measure to minimize the risk of person-to-person transmission of COVID-19. To ensure physical distancing, the Ministry of Health recommends that employers consider:

- Marking out a distance of 2 metres between seats and seating areas to ensure physical distancing in shared spaces and lines (i.e., reception areas, meeting rooms, waiting rooms, grocery lines, kitchenettes, elevators, offices and other work spaces).
- Admitting fewer customers or limiting the number of clients visiting a business or workplace at a given time.
- Dedicating specific hours to high-risk populations, including those over 70 and with disabilities.
- Encouraging the use of self-scanning technologies at check outs.
- Encouraging customers to pack their own purchases, whenever possible, and discouraging the use of multi-use bags.
- Requiring passengers to sit in the rear seat of a vehicle and open the windows, weather permitting, in taxis and rideshares.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In situations where the strategies above are not practical or possible, businesses may consider the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). The Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Guidance: Essential Workplaces](#) provides some tips for optimizing the use of PPE.

- In most situations, workers don't need to wear personal protective equipment to protect themselves against COVID-19. The pandemic doesn't change existing requirements that may apply to certain workplaces or professions.
- Non-medical face coverings are strongly recommended for both employees and customers when physical distancing is difficult to maintain. The Ontario Government has created a [poster](#) providing further instructions on how to safely wear a face covering when physical distancing is a challenge.
- In general, medical PPE should be preserved for Health Care Workers, First Responders, and other employees who require this equipment to do their job safely. If work involves direct contact with individuals confirmed or suspected to be infected with COVID-19, or direct contact with COVID-19 contaminated objects or environments, [Public Health Ontario](#) recommends that the appropriate personal protective equipment must be used. This requires gloves, gown, surgical/procedure mask, and face shield or goggles. For protection against COVID-19, N95 respirators are only required for aerosol generating medical procedures and when otherwise determined by a regulated health professional.
 - Public Health Ontario's [Risk Algorithm to Guide PPE Use](#) provides a simple way to determine if PPE might be required for specific tasks.

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- If personal protective equipment is provided by the employer, employees must be trained on safe use, care, and limitations, including [putting on and taking off equipment](#) and [proper disposal](#).
- To support workers who require PPE and the economic recovery of the province, the government has launched a website to provide businesses with information on personal protective equipment (PPE) suppliers. The [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#) has an up-to-date list of Ontario companies and business associations that are ready to supply personal protective equipment to keep your employees and customers safe from COVID-19. An alternative option is to acquire a supply of [cloth masks, by having them made](#) or by purchasing from a local supplier.

3. Have policies in place

Develop the necessary policies to manage entry of all individuals into your workplace, including policies around who can be at the workplace, screening prior to entering the workplace, how to address illness that arises at the workplace, and how workers can be kept safe in adjusted working conditions. The Public Services Health & Safety Association (PSHSA) [Return to the Workplace Roadmap](#) is a framework intended to assist employers in building a dynamic and sustainable return to the workplace plan in three stages: planning, implementation, and operational stage. The PSHSA also created the [COVID-19 Prevention & Response Policy](#) template that can be used by workplaces as they implement the relevant measures and policies to keep employees safe. It outlines the general responsibilities of workplaces, employers, supervisors, and workers in terms of the procedures required to control the spread of infection in the workplace.

COVID-19 Screening

Employers should ensure that all employees complete the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#) before entering the workplace or reporting for work.

How to Report Illness

If experiencing symptoms, workers should remain at home, inform their supervisors, and complete the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#) for further direction. If an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, the WECHU will follow up with the employee, the employer, and all [close contacts](#) of the individual to advise them on next steps for testing, isolation, and how to keep themselves and others safe. Positive cases of COVID-19 must self-isolate for 14 days from onset of symptoms. At the end of the two weeks, provided they have been symptom free for 48 hours or longer, individuals would be able to return to work ensuring that they are following COVID-19 infection prevention practices in line with all public health recommendations. Individual workplaces can create their own guidelines and policies regarding return to work for their employees as long as they are not less restrictive than the public health guidance.

Review Health & Safety Policies and Building Sanitation Practices

Reviewing health and safety policies as well as existing building sanitation practices is especially important for buildings that have been closed for an extended period of time. The Building Owners and Managers Association's [COVID-19 – Building Extended Closure Checklist](#) provides building-specific maintenance and cleaning considerations for businesses and workplaces preparing to reopen for the first time since the provincial Emergency Orders were enacted. Some items on the checklist include:

- Security system checks, first aid supplies
- Ventilation and HVAC checks
- Drinking water systems checks (flush your water line and contact Enwin or your water utility provider if you have questions. If you are a Small Drinking Water System contact ext. 4475)
- Rodent and pest droppings cleaned and removed appropriately
- Expired food product checked – there may have been a power failure when the business was closed, you should discard items if you are unsure.

The Workplace Safety & Prevention Services' [Pathogen Decontamination Checklist](#) provides guidance in [infection prevention and control practices](#) to facilities that are preparing to resume operations without compromising the health and safety of staff and clients.

4. Create communication plans and staff training

It is the responsibility of employers to communicate with employees, staff, and customers entering the business or workplace so that they are aware of the procedures in place to keep everyone safe. The following should be implemented, where applicable, to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace:

- Adjust entry and exit points as required
- Include relevant signage at the entrance and throughout the building (e.g., self assessment, physical distancing, flow of customers, hand washing, wearing of masks)
- Provide visual cues to direct traffic in stairwells, isles, etc.
- Provide staff with information and training for all new procedures
- Create new policies and procedures for all relevant issues related to COVID-19, such as:
 - Shift scheduling
 - Reduced service offerings (i.e., any services that cannot be done with adequate physical distancing or protection)



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- Touchless methods of staff/customer interactions, such as not accepting cash, not accepting reusable bags for bagging items
- Staff self assessment requirements
- Handling illness (i.e., staff not coming to work when sick and how to manage staff illness at work)
- Managing suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases, including return to work
- Mental health and wellness promotion and support.

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services has produced a number of resources to educate employers and employees about how to prepare for COVID-19 in the workplace as well as how to minimize the risk of person-to-person spread. The following are a few of those resources.

- [Pandemic Awareness eCourse](#): This free online course describes what a pandemic is and the impact a pandemic may have on workplaces and communities.
- [Coronavirus Preparedness for Employers and Employees eCourse | French Version](#)

5. Monitor the risk

- Things may change as your business operates. If you identify a new area of concern, or if it seems like something isn't working, take steps to update your policies and procedures. Involve workers and if relevant, health and safety representatives, in this process.
- Ensure that workers can raise safety concerns. This may be through the owner directly, a worker health and safety representative, or a joint health and safety committee. Employers with fewer than 20 employees must have a way for workers to raise health and safety concerns at the workplace. Work with these committees and workers to resolve any identified safety issues.

6. Additional considerations

If your workplace has not been operating, there may be risks arising from restarting your business that should be managed. Consider the following:

- Have you had any staff turnover, or are workers being required to change or adapt job roles, or to use new equipment? Provide training and new employee orientation as necessary.
- Will workers need time or training to refresh their skills after having been out of the workplace?
- Have you changed anything about the way you operate, such as the equipment you use or the products you create?

- Are there any processes required for start-up that might introduce risks? Consider the impact of restarting machinery, tools and equipment, or clearing systems and lines of product that may have been left when your business was closed.

The Workplace Safety & Prevention Services has developed the '[Business Pandemic Preparedness Checklist](#)' to serve as a tool to help workplaces set priorities, develop and implement plans to ensure employees and customers/clients are protected.

Appendix A Resources

- [Business Pandemic Preparedness Checklist](#)
- Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) created the [COVID-19 – Building Extended Closure Checklist](#)
- Canadian Chamber of Commerce [COVID-19 Pandemic Preparedness for Business Coronavirus Preparedness for Employers and Employees eCourse | French Version](#)
- Downtown Windsor Business Improvement Association (DWBIA) [COVID-19 Info & Resources](#)
- Health Canada: [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\)](#)
- Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development [Infection Prevention and Control](#)
- Government of Canada [Non-medical masks and face coverings: Sew and no-sew instructions](#)
- Ontario Chamber of Commerce [COVID-19 Pandemic Preparedness Toolkit](#)
- Ontario Government [COVID-19: Support for businesses](#)
- Ontario Government Sector-Specific [Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace](#)
- [Pathogen Decontamination Checklist](#)
- [Pandemic Awareness eCourse](#)
- [Post Pandemic Business Resumption Checklist](#)
- Public Health Ontario [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#)
- [Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Windsor-Essex County Health Unit Workplace Webpage](#)
- [Workplace Safety & Prevention Services](#)
- [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#)
 - [Wolfhead Distillery Hand Sanitizer](#)

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Appendix B Covid-19 Signs

