



Guidance on reducing the risk of COVID-19 to workers in processing facilities

November 10, 2020

Processing facilities must protect their workers from acquiring COVID-19 on the job. This guidance outlines the expectations of facilities in limiting the spread of COVID-19 at the workplace. Facilities should be prepared by having written procedures supported by activities and records (e.g., visitor log records, employee health checks, COVID-19 training records) that demonstrate compliance with procedures. Procedures are to be made available on request to WorkSafe and public health inspectors to provide assurance that workers are protected from infection at the work site.

How is virus spread?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. The primary mode of human-to-human transmission is direct contact with an infected person and their respiratory droplets. Respiratory droplets are generated by speaking, breathing, coughing and sneezing and exposure is greatest when there is prolonged close contact with an infected person. Increased risk of respiratory droplet spread can occur when workers are close together on a production line during shifts, when workers enter and exit the premises, in common break areas and washrooms, and during car-pooling or in parking lots. Virus is spread through large respiratory droplets (>5 µm) but may also be spread by smaller respiratory droplets (<5 µm) that can stay suspended in the air for longer periods and over longer distances particularly in poorly ventilated areas.¹ Close contact of 2 metres or less increases risk.

Contact with contaminated surfaces followed by touching of the eyes, mouth or nose is another recognized mode of transmission. Surfaces can become contaminated by droplets, aerosols, or feces, either directly or by touching an object with contaminated hands.

An infected person can transmit the virus to others both before they show any symptoms and when they are symptomatic. The time between infection and symptom onset ranges from 0 to 14 days, and some people do not develop any symptoms. Most transmission seems to occur during the symptomatic phase, but research is still needed to understand the roles of pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic transmission. Once a person becomes symptomatic, they may transmit the virus to others for days up to several weeks.

¹ National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. An introduction to SARS-CoV-2 (last updated July 15, 2020). <https://nccceh.ca/documents/evidence-review/introduction-sars-cov-2>



Returning to work during the pandemic

Arriving at work

- Carpooling is not recommended. Workers should opt for individual transport to the workplace.
- Should transport be provided, the same workers should be assigned to specific vehicles and locations. Limit the number of workers in each vehicle to maintain distance between workers (e.g., only fill every other seat).
- Workers should be asked if they are sick before entering the workplace. Workers are advised to self-assess for COVID-19 symptoms (sore throat, cough, fever with temperatures at or above 38°C or 100.4°F) using the [self-assessment tool BC COVID 19](#). Symptomatic workers should not be allowed on site.
- Stagger workschedules to avoid crowding when workers arrive and leave work. Add additional clock in/out stations, if possible, that are spaced apart, to reduce crowding at check in.
- Assign workers to the same shifts with the same coworkers. Cohorting may reduce the spread of workplace coronavirus transmission by minimizing the number of different individuals who come into close contact with each other over the course of a week, and in the event of COVID-19 exposure may also reduce the number of workers quarantined.
- Consider multiple shifts with fewer workers.
- Where feasible, keep separate entry and exits into the facility and ensure that traffic flows in a single direction through the facility.

Worker education and supervision

- Educate workers in the language(s) they understand best (or use pictograms) about coronavirus, how to prevent its transmission and about hygiene and physical distancing procedures used at the workplace.
- Appoint one or more COVID-19 safety coordinators to record and report on employee wellness when employees arrive at work and wellness during work; ensure hand washing and physical distancing requirements are in place and maintained in all locations during processing and employee breaks; that appropriate PPE and hand washing and disinfecting supplies are available; and that enhanced cleaning and disinfection practices occur. This person could address worker concerns about COVID-19 and could be someone other than the regular supervisor or health and safety representative.
- Post physical distancing signs in common areas that can be read from a distance; portable electronic reader boards can also be used.
- Post handwashing and personal hygiene signs in washrooms and lunchrooms. [Handwashing poster](#)
- Encourage employees to self-report if they are experiencing symptoms of illness. Facilitate their leaving the plant promptly.

Changing areas

- If workers have assigned areas or lockers for changing, limit the number of workers in the locker area at one time. There should be at least 2 meters between workers in the change areas.
- Post signs on doors and entry points of locker rooms and change room doors as to the maximum number of workers who can be in the room.



Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Surgical masks and cloth masks are expected to be worn in areas where physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain.² Cloth masks do limit the spread of large respiratory droplets; they offer some protection to workers by reducing spread from a person who coughs and may be infected but not know it.
- If employers provide masks to workers, ensure that workers are informed of the following:
 - masks should be worn over the nose and mouth and fit snugly
 - non-medical masks are recommended by Government of Canada to prevent community spread.³ Cloth masks should be worn over the nose and mouth and fit snugly;
 - masks need to be kept clean and dry (i.e., masks become less effective if wet/damp);
 - wash hands before [donning](#) and [doffing](#) gloves, masks (avoid touching eyes or nose when putting on masks) and other PPE;
 - each worker may require a number of masks as a mask will build up moisture during the day and should be changed as required;
 - if workers use their own masks, they should be instructed on how to properly clean and disinfect them for use the next day (launder using the warmest water setting and machine dry daily after the shift).
- Wear appropriate goggles, gloves and protective clothing when mixing or applying cleaners and disinfectants to surfaces.
- First aid attendants should have access to PPE (N-95 and/or surgical masks, face shields, gloves) to protect them from exposure to the coronavirus.

Worker Hygiene

- Schedule handwashing breaks so workers can wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If required, schedule a relief worker to give line staff an opportunity to wash their hands.
- Place handwashing stations or hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol in multiple locations to encourage hand hygiene. If possible, choose hand sanitizer stations that are touch-free. These should be placed at locations where there are major touch points – e.g., at clock in/out stations.
- Wear clean work wear daily.
- Practice sneezing and coughing etiquette when not wearing masks: into elbow and not hands.
- Avoid touching eyes and nose especially when putting on or taking off a facial mask.
- Limit the number of workers allowed at a time into washrooms.

Ventilation

- Consider general ventilation adjustments at the workplace, such as increasing ventilation and increasing the amount of fresh (outdoor) air used by the system.

²National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. Masking during Covid-19 Pandemic (last updated October 21, 2020). <https://ncceh.ca/documents/guide/masking-during-covid-19-pandemic>

³Government of Canada. Non-medical masks. November 3, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html#a1>



- Upgrade the filters to at least a MERV 14 if possible.
- Identify and protect vulnerable air intakes, such as air return/make up air intakes in close proximity to workers.
- Maintain the indoor air temperature and humidity at comfortable levels for building occupants; except in areas required to have lower temperatures for food processing.
- For complex buildings, consult with a ventilation technician or other expert in adjusting the system.
- If using portable fans or air conditioners, make sure they are arranged so they don't exhaust from one worker to another.

On the production line

- Assign workers to the same shifts with the same coworkers.
- Create a barrier between workers by erecting partitions (e.g., strip curtains or plexiglass) or marking floors (using adhesive coloured tape, chalk, etc.) to provide worker protection when spacing of at least two meters is not possible, and include cleaning and disinfecting of barriers in the sanitation plan.
- If two workers are working within 2 meters for longer than 15 minutes, both are expected to wear masks and protective eyewear (e.g., safety glasses or a face shield). The use of PPE is only recommended if wearing these does not present a safety risk (for example if a face shield interferes with proper vision of the task due to light-diffraction).
- Space workers on production lines by either expanding the length of the line or by removing every other worker from a 'like task' line so workers can be further apart.
- Reduce production speed to decrease the number of workers needed on the line (running multiple shifts may allow for additional production) or reduce number of products or volume on the line.
- Assign higher risk employees (those 65 years and older and workers of any age with serious underlying medical conditions) to work tasks that allow them to maintain a 2 meter distance.
- Avoid close contact between workers when transferring items, tools or materials, documents etc.
- Where feasible, worker traffic flow should be one-way through the facility. Post signs and use line marking as appropriate to ensure safe physical distancing.
- Designate a drop-off and pick-up point for transferring items, tools or materials between workers.
- Provide for communication between workers in a noisy environment that does not involve close personal contact between workers – use hand-held signs, hand signals, radios, cell phones, etc. Devices on the production floor should not introduce a food safety hazard and should be cleaned and sanitized and included in the sanitation plan.
- Remove unnecessary goods and equipment to increase floor space.
- Dispose of facemasks and gloves in a designated container when leaving the production area. If reusable PPE used, disinfect after each use.

For more information, see

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/employers-businesses/food-businesses> and <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/covid-19-returning-safe-operation>

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