Waste collection worker health and safety during COVID-19

Overview
This is not a legal document and employers are advised to seek legal advice.

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.

Ontario is currently in the midst of a global pandemic. While the COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly, the legislation and regulations used to govern Ontario’s workplaces are not.

Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to keep workers and work sites safe and free of hazards. Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work. If health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can seek enforcement by filing a complaint with the ministry’s Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008. Failure of the employer or supervisor 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.

According to the list of Essential Services by the Province of Ontario, waste collection falls under Utilities and Community Services and are deemed an essential service.

Generally, management of waste that is suspected or known to contain or be contaminated with COVID-19 does not require additional precautions beyond those already used to protect workers from the hazards they encounter during their routine job tasks in solid waste, including medical waste, and wastewater management.

For household waste and recycling, use typical engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE, such as puncture-resistant gloves and face and eye protection, to prevent worker exposure to the waste streams (or types of waste), including any contaminants in the materials, they manage.

For medical waste with potential or known COVID-19 contamination, manage like any other regulated medical waste.

For more information visit ihsa.ca/COVID-19
Waste collection worker health and safety during COVID-19 con’t

On-site best practices
The health and safety of workers is a top concern amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, all parties must place an increased focus on health and safety in order to keep workers safe and services operational.

All measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should be done in compliance with requirements under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and associated regulations and public health directives issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Below are a set of resources, tips, and best practices to help employers prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Protecting yourself and your co-workers
Coronaviruses are spread through close contact, including at work. Here are some helpful tips to help prevent the spread of germs:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Sneeze and cough into your sleeve.
- If you use a tissue, discard immediately and wash your hands afterward.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid high-touch areas, where possible, or ensure you wash your hands after.
- Where possible, wear disposable gloves when interacting with high-touch areas. Do not touch your face with gloved hands. Take care when removing gloves – put them in the garbage and ensure you wash your hands after removing them.
- Wash your clothes as soon as you get home.
- If you are ill: notify your supervisor immediately, complete the self-assessment and follow the instructions you receive.

Reporting illness
The symptoms of COVID-19 are like many other illnesses, including the cold and flu. At this time, it is recommended that any worker who has any symptoms related to cold, flu, or COVID-19 should be sent home.

In addition, employers should advise these workers to complete the online self-assessment or call either:
- Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000
- their primary care provider (for example, family physician)

Getting information on infection prevention and control
Employers can contact local public health units for questions on workplace infection prevention and control related to COVID-19 infections. Please note that additional resources, policies, and procedures are being developed to provide additional support in this area.

Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development reporting requirements
Employers must report all known positive test results for COVID-19 to:
- the ministry (in writing) within four days
- the joint health and safety representative
- a trade union (if applicable)

For more information visit [ihsa.ca/Covid-19](http://ihsa.ca/Covid-19)
Waste collection worker health and safety during COVID-19 con’t

Share information
It is important that all parties in a workplace communicate their roles and responsibilities. Employers will need to ensure health and safety policies are updated and posted for all employees to see. Using industry resources, including this one and others produced by the Infrastructure Health & Safety Association (IHSA), will improve on-site understanding.

Post your policies
All employers need to post and communicate COVID-19 policies to employees and contractors. These policies should cover how the workplace will operate, including, but not limited to:
• the sanitization of equipment and vehicles
• how employees and contractors report illnesses
• how to ensure physical distancing
• how work will be scheduled

Physical distancing (two metres)
As advised by the Chief Medical Officer, public health officials, and outlined throughout government communications, physical distancing is required to control the spread of COVID-19.

In order to ensure physical distancing on site, employers should consider:
• staggering start times
• staggering breaks
• staggering lunches
• restricting the number of people on-site and where they are assigned to work
• controlling site movement (by limiting the potential for workers to gather, including personnel in small offices or site trailers)
• holding meetings in an outside or large space to enable physical distancing
• limiting unnecessary on-site contact between workers, and between workers and outside service providers, and encourage physical distancing in these areas (for example, by removing coffee trucks from site)
• utilizing technology i.e. smart phones, scanners, or electronic file distribution to avoid the need to distribute paperwork and files in close proximity

Sanitization practices
Coronaviruses are spread person to person through close contact, including at work. While employers always have an obligation to maintain clean workplaces, that obligation is under sharper focus during an outbreak like the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Employers should focus on:
• access to soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
• washroom facilities
• sanitizing commonly touched surfaces or areas such as operator vehicles
• avoid sharing of hand tools and power tools (if sharing is necessary, enable sanitization of shared equipment)
• posting signage on hygiene in English and the majority workplace language (if different than English) so everyone can understand how to do their part

Vehicle sanitization: Throughout the course of the shift, drivers/collectors should regularly sanitize door handles and instruments commonly used in the vehicles including the steering wheel, signal indicators, gear shifter, seat belt buckle and harness, and driver and passenger seats with a soap and water mixture or with disinfectant wipes or similar products.

For more information visit ihsa.ca/COVID-19
Waste collection worker health and safety during COVID-19 con’t

Waste collection

Like in all other circumstances of waste collection, protect workers through the use of engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE.

- **PPE:** Wear CSA approved safety glasses and fully coated nitrile work gloves that are cut and abrasion resistant to prevent worker exposure to the waste streams (or types of wastes), including any contaminants in the materials, they manage. Suggested to also have a set of disposable nitrile gloves that can be worn under work gloves that can be disposed of after use.
- **Avoid contact:** Drivers and collectors should avoid contact with residents or employees from service businesses.
- **Safe work practices:**
  - Do not reach into waste containers. If waste material cannot be safely dislodged set the container down.
  - Do not overload the hopper. Overloading the hopper could cause waste to fall out of the hopper and onto the roadway where additional clean up and handling would be required.
  - If waste material falls onto the road or a bag of waste breaks open, do not attempt to clean the waste up with your hands. Clean up and dispose of all messes/spills with a shovel. Do not handle any potentially contaminated waste with your hands.
  - When cycling the hopper, stand to the side of the truck and operate the controls as per the MLTSD’s Mobile Compacting equipment safety guideline. Staying clear of the hopper area will prevent you from being caught in the compaction equipment and being hit by any projectile or potentially harmful waste debris.
  - When the on-route collection is complete, remove work gloves prior to entering the cab and if wearing a set of underlying nitrile gloves dispose of those adequately in a plastic bag and then sanitize or wash your hands immediately before touching your face, before you eat, smoke, or drink.

**Note:** If hand sanitizer is not available, bring along a jug of water, liquid soap and paper towels to wash and dry your hands. Reminder: workers should wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.

**Breaks:** Recognizing that several public facilities and access to food may be limited during the COVID-19 pandemic, the first recommendation is for drivers to pack and bring their own meals. Additionally, have dispatch pre-map out all public facilities that are available for access to drivers on their designated routes.

As a reminder, it is recommended that workers wash or sanitize their hands:
- at start of their shift and before they start work
- before eating, drinking, or smoking
- after using the toilet facilities
- after handling tools or materials that may be contaminated
- at the end of their shift before they leave work

**Clothing:** It is recommended that uniforms are changed daily. The cleaning of work clothes minimizes the possibility of spreading the virus. If workers do not have access to a laundry service and showers at work, when they get home, they should remove their boots and work clothes in the garage or far from the main living area. Bag work clothes and launder them immediately upon entering your home. Do not shake clothes. Wash clothes at a temperature of at least 60 degrees with ordinary detergent. After removing work clothes, shower before taking part in any other home activities. It is also recommended that workers sanitize their personal vehicle appropriately.

**Adjust on-site and production schedules:** Physical distancing may result in lower staffing on assigned shifts. In order to keep services operating, employers will need to adjust production

For more information visit [ihsa.ca/COVID-19](https://ihsa.ca/COVID-19)
Waste Collection Worker health and safety during COVID-19 con’t

schedules as the impacts of physical distancing become clear. All workplace parties will need to collaborate to ensure there is a clear understanding of how production will be impacted and discuss recommendations and solutions.

Schedules should consider:
- limiting number of workers by staggering work schedules
- sanitation of sites, workspaces, and equipment
- site planning to facilitate appropriate physical distancing (two metres) between workers during any particular shift

Track and monitor your workforce: Due to the time it could take for symptoms of COVID-19 to develop, it is important to track where employees have worked. If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will ask employers to provide information on where the employee worked as well as the contact information of any other employee who may have been exposed. Employers will track information and Public Health Units will respond.

Resources

IHSA.ca: ihsa.ca/covid-19

COVID-19 government updates: Stay updated with daily government updates:
- Government of Ontario
- Government of Canada

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

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

For more information visit ihsa.ca/COVID-19