

Preparing for and Responding to COVID-19 in High Risk Workplaces

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List of Abbreviations

AHS	Alberta Health Services
CDC	Communicable Disease Control
CMOH	Chief Medical officer of Health
EPH	Environmental Public Health
OHS	Government of Alberta Occupational Health and Safety

Contact

Alberta Health Services Environmental Public Health
Government of Alberta Occupational Health and Safety

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Preparing for COVID-19 in the Workplace

During this COVID-19 pandemic, it is the responsibility of all employers to carefully and continually consider how they can reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 infection among employees¹. The emergence of variant strains of COVID-19 with their increased ability to spread between persons has increased the importance of measures to prevent infections and to stop the spread.

This resource describes employer roles, responsibilities, and legal obligations to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 cases in workplaces that are at high risk for outbreaks. These are workplaces where individuals work in close proximity indoors for extended periods of time, including food processing facilities and meat packing plants, warehouses, and distribution or manufacturing facilities. This document also explains the roles and responsibilities of Alberta Health Services (AHS), and [Government of Alberta Occupational Health & Safety \(OHS\)](#) when there are COVID-19 cases in the workplace.

This resource is intended as supplementary information to the [Public Health Orders](#) issued by the Chief Medical officer of Health (CMOH) and posted Guidance. It does not supersede any legislated Public Health or Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) requirements, CMOH Orders or Guidance.

Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace

When taking action to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace, employee safety and wellbeing is the most important consideration. Effective screening programs, workplace infection prevention and control measures, having a plan in place if a case of COVID-19 occurs in the workplace, and supporting employees who are unable to attend work are key to ensuring employee safety and wellbeing.

Employers are legally responsible for identifying and implementing measures to comply with public health measures under the Public Health Act, and adhering to OHS legislation. Employers are responsible for proactively monitoring workplace activities and employee behaviour to ensure compliance with public health orders. Non-compliance with public health orders can result in tickets (fines) for violation, or, in some cases of continued non-compliance, the application of administrative penalties. OHS officers have the authority to issue tickets to employers, supervisors or workers for not complying with public

Information about common challenges in high risk workplaces can be found in this document, including:

- Ensuring Public Health orders are followed
- Effective screening for infection
- Wearing masks correctly
- Identifying close contacts
- Supporting individuals to isolate or quarantine
- Safe return to work
- Connecting with community resources for support



¹ An employer is a person who employs or engages one or more workers, including workers from a temporary staffing agency; a person designated to represent an employer; or, a person responsible for overseeing workers' health and safety within an organization. Employees refers to all workers, contractors, and volunteers who perform or supply services for an organization or employer.

health order requirements. The authority remains in effect as long as the public health order is in effect.

Employees working while symptomatic or during the period they are infectious before symptoms begin may cause outbreaks in the workplace. Supporting employees who are unable to attend work due to being deemed a close contact or having symptoms is an important responsibility of the employer and essential to building employee confidence during this pandemic. Employee confidence and trust in the employer strongly influences adherence to COVID-19 prevention and management efforts.

The following sections highlight specific actions for employers to prevent and prepare for COVID-19 transmission in the workplace, and includes a list of resources to get more information.

Implement Public Health Measures to Prevent Transmission

- Ensure compliance with all [Public Health Orders](#)
- Ensure employees [screen for symptoms](#).
- Ensure physical distancing in all areas of the workplace, including break areas, change areas, and designated smoking areas.
- Ensure the appropriate use of personal protective equipment, and enforce in all work and non-work areas. [Masks are mandatory](#) in all indoor workplaces in Alberta. It is the employer's responsibility to monitor staff use of well fitted, non-medical masks.
- Implement [infection prevention and control](#) measures. These are actions that help protect us from infections.
- Do not allow communal food sharing in any areas of the workplace, including break areas, change areas, and designated smoking areas. Food sharing has been identified as a risk for spreading infection.
- Monitor and manage potential areas of congestion such as change rooms, bathrooms and hallways.
- Review employee transportation activities. Carpooling has been identified as a risk for spreading infection.

Bandanas, buffs or neck gaiters, scarves and other loosely woven, single layer fabrics do not meet current best evidence for non-medical masks. They should not be used in high risk workplaces.

Masks need to be well fitted to be effective, and are recommended to have a minimum of 3 layers of fabric. Click [here](#) for ways to improve mask fit.



Maintain Up to Date Contact Information for Employees, Contractors, and Volunteers (if applicable)

If a case of COVID-19 occurs in the workplace it is the responsibility of the employer to provide AHS with a list of workplace close contacts. Have complete, up to date information for all employees to assist in this process.

Information should include:

- First and last name
- Date of birth
- Up-to-date phone numbers, both land line and cell numbers
- Staff lists with work schedule/shift and position information

Support Employees

The following recommendations are ways employers can support employees before a case of COVID-19 is found in the workplace.

- Communicate to employees that you are there to support them to be safe at work and will support them if they need to be absent from work
- Document the employees' preferred language – even if they do speak English – this is important when it comes to education, cultural customs and social supports
- Deliver concrete messages on how you will support employees using preferred language supports (spoken and written) where possible
- Connect employees with available Human Resources and/or Workplace Wellness supports that have been developed during the pandemic.
- Provide non-medical grade masks for employees and their households to use when in the community.
- Provide support for travel if employees carpool to work.
- Ensure employee travel from worksite to worksite complies with public health measures
- Assess immigration status (Temporary [i.e. work permit holders], Permanent Resident, or Citizen) to determine eligibility for provincial and federal financial supports related to [pandemic recovery](#).
- Share with employees a list of translated resources that are available to help understand public health measures. [Resources are found at the end of this document.](#)
- Share with employees a contact list of the immigrant organizations that are available to support, including providing translation services and assistance in their first language to apply for worker benefits. [Resources are found at the end of this document.](#)

Loss of income due to being off work is a significant worry for employees during the pandemic.

Proactively sharing information with employees about available financial supports can help ease their worries about loss of income if they have been advised by AHS Public Health to isolate, quarantine, or report mild symptoms and cannot attend work.



Discontinue Actions Associated with Increased COVID-19 Transmission

Some practices have been found to increase risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace. It is recommended employers do not use practices such as:

- Incentive programs for attendance during the pandemic. Incentive programs may encourage employees to work while ill.
- Do not imply or take [disciplinary action](#) against employees who report symptoms, or if employees must be absent from work. Employees should be assured that they will NOT be penalized for being unable to work. Fear of disciplinary action can deter employees from disclosing symptoms and they may instead choose to work while ill. If an employee has reasonable cause to believe they have experienced discriminatory action because of their involvement in a protected activity, they can file a [discriminatory action complaint \(DAC\)](#) with OHS.
- Limiting workers to one single worksite. Many workers are employed at more than one workplace. Excluding employees with secondary employment from one workplace without confirmation of a positive COVID-19 case is not appropriate and may contribute to workers not disclosing mild symptoms, and attending work to ensure income.

Resources

Below are links to resources and information to support you and your and workplace to implement measures to keep all employees safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[General AHS COVID-19 Information](#)

[General Alberta Health COVID-19 Information](#)

[COVID-19 Information: General Operational Guidance](#)

[COVID-19 Guidance for Warehouse Operations](#)

[COVID-19 Information: Outbreak Management Plans for Large Production Facilities](#)

[Alberta Biz Connect Workplace Guidance](#)

One COVID-19 Case in the Workplace

Once there is one case of COVID-19 in high risk workplaces, like food production facilities, warehouses, and distribution or manufacturing facilities, it can spread very quickly. This section describes the actions employers will be expected to take, and identifies the regulators' roles and responsibilities in response to COVID-19.

Employer Roles and Responsibilities

If AHS identifies a confirmed COVID-19 case associated with a workplace the employer will be expected to work cooperatively with AHS Communicable Disease Control (CDC) to ensure anyone potentially exposed to the case receives correct information about quarantine requirements. The employer will receive a phone call from AHS CDC requesting the names and contact information of those determined to be close contacts to the case. A negative COVID-19 test and/or a medical note is not required to return to work once an employee's isolation period is complete. This guidance can be found on the [Alberta Health website](#).

It is imperative that all those who are identified as close contacts be notified quickly so they can quarantine for the required time. Employees may not return to work while in quarantine. This is a legal requirement and mandatory under the Public Health Act. Individuals who are partially or fully immunized have different quarantine requirements and testing recommendations than those with no immunization protection. More information can be found [here](#).

A close contact is anyone who, during the [infectious period](#):

- lived with or was within two metres of a person who has COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more of cumulative contact, i.e. multiple interactions for a total of 15 minutes or more, even if a mask was worn during that contact, or
- has had direct contact with bodily fluids of a person who has COVID-19 (e.g., was coughed or sneezed on), or
- provided direct care for a person who has COVID-19, or
- has physical contact with a person who has COVID-19, such as handshake, hugging, kissing, or sexual activity, or
- shares items with a person who has COVID-19 such as drinks, personal hygiene items, cigarettes, vapes, lipstick, eating utensils, etc.



AHS and OHS Roles and Responsibilities

AHS CDC, Environmental Public Health (EPH) and Medical Officer of Health, and OHS will be aware as soon as there is a case of COVID-19 in a workplace and will monitor the workplace for additional

cases that may arise.

AHS CDC will inform workplaces of the case and collect the list of close contacts.

Do not pressure employees who have been identified as close contacts to return to work if they test negative for COVID-19. This practice is illegal.

Employers risk further government enforcement action if this practice is followed.



OHS may contact the employer and conduct an onsite inspection to monitor compliance with OHS legislation and public health orders (e.g. access to personal protective equipment, involvement in hazard assessment). OHS will also monitor to see that employees are educated and trained in the processes and controls employers have in place to address identified risks.

AHS EPH may contact the employer and conduct an onsite inspection to complete a risk assessment regarding the type of facility, and assess history of previous infractions and recent inspections, for example.

Resources

Below are links to resources to support employers in the event there is a confirmed COVID-19 case associated with your workplace.

[AHS Contact Tracing Notification Process](#)
[Information for Close Contacts of a COVID-19 case](#)
[Alberta OHS Legislation](#)
[Quarantine for Immunized Close Contacts](#)

Confirmed Outbreak

An outbreak is declared in workplaces at high risk of COVID-19 transmission when two cases are identified within a short period of time that appear to be linked². Declaring an outbreak triggers AHS Public Health action to work closely with employers to better evaluate what precautions/practices are currently in place, provide feedback and make recommendations for additional public health measures if needed. The level of intervention will vary depending on the degree of exposure related to the workplace, and if the workplace is deemed to be critical/essential.

Employer Roles and Responsibilities

If an outbreak is declared, AHS CDC will call the employer to gather more information and relay any next steps. The employer is responsible for:

- keeping employees aware and informed of the outbreak status at the workplace
- providing AHS CDC a list of known close contacts to the COVID-19 cases
- providing AHS CDC names and contact information of all employees if prevalence testing is being arranged. This is proactive testing of everyone associated with the workplace to identify

² The threshold for AHS to declare an outbreak at large, high risk worksites (2 cases) is different than the threshold for public reporting of worksite outbreaks by Alberta Health. Having a low threshold for declaring an outbreak ensures AHS Public Health is immediately involved to support the workplace to protect staff from spread of COVID-19.

people who may have COVID-19 even if they have no symptoms. This helps stop the spread of the virus.

- providing information to AHS outbreak Investigator on any new cases that arise
- supporting employees and ensuring that they are following the legal requirements for isolating and quarantining

AHS and OHS Roles and Responsibilities

AHS EPH and OHS' objective is to work with employers to help them apply and comply with public health orders and recommendations. If an outbreak is declared, AHS EPH is notified and may conduct an assessment of site outbreak management and control practices in place, provide recommendations. Enforcement, including closure, may be considered for non-compliance.

During an onsite inspection, an OHS officer may conduct activities to establish facts about the workplace. This may include assessing that workers have resources and/or equipment they require (e.g., access to personal protective equipment [PPE]). During the inspection, the officer will include employer and employee representatives, such as a health and safety committee co-chair or health and safety representative. Officers have a wide range of enforcement and educational tools during a workplace inspection. These may include:

- meeting with staff or management
- health and safety presentations
- issuing orders, and/or
- serving violation tickets

Resources

The following links to resources are provided to support employers in the event there is a COVID-19 outbreak declared in the workplace.

[Alberta OHS Legislation](#)
[Stronger public health measures](#)

Resuming Operations Following an Outbreak

Following an outbreak, AHS and OHS might have some contact with workplaces, depending on the outcomes of inspections. This section describes what to expect from AHS and OHS once an outbreak is declared over, and employer responsibilities.

AHS and OHS Roles and Responsibilities

AHS CDC will declare a workplace outbreak to be over 28 days after the date symptoms started in the most recent case associated with the workplace.

AHS EPH may work with AHS CDC and/or the Medical Officer of Health for any further follow up required with the employer, including outstanding recommendations provided during initial assessment or inspections. In situations where workplace closures occurred by enforcement order, AHS EPH may follow up on site to verify mitigation measures are still effective.

If compliance orders were written for non-compliance following inspection, OHS officers follow-up with the employer to verify compliance. Where compliance has not been achieved, the officer will educate and/or consider additional compliance tools to bring the employer into compliance.

Employer Roles and Responsibilities

Once a workplace outbreak is declared over, work restrictions and isolation/quarantine requirements for staff only continue to apply to those employees identified as cases, or close contacts of cases, as advised by AHS CDC.

During a COVID-19 outbreak, employers may have altered their operations to adapt to a decreased work force or capacity to prevent further spread. Employers must continue to assess their operations and complete hazard assessments, maintain all controls, and ensure employees are trained to reflect current practices in the workplace.

Employers must also:

- continue to implement enhanced monitoring for ill staff
- maintain ongoing infection prevention and control measures as recommended by AHS EPH and/or OHS

Resources

[Alberta Biz Connect](#) is the source of workplace guidance and supports to help businesses affected by COVID-19 operate safely and support their recovery.

See also [resources](#) under the earlier section, Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace.

Frequently Asked Questions

This section includes commonly asked questions and their answers to help employers better understand their responsibilities and risk of workplace transmission.

Question: My employees are all wearing masks. Why are they close contacts?

Wearing a non-medical mask is a tool to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. It has not been proven that masks protect the person wearing the mask, but it can help protect people from being exposed to germs. Wearing a mask reduces the risk of transmission but does not change whether or not an individual would be considered a close contact. Employers must correctly determine close contacts. The following are commonly overlooked exposures to consider when identifying close contacts:

- Cumulative exposure – people who more frequently and repeatedly came into contact with the confirmed positive case are at increased risk
- Where feasible, consider other non-work exposures
- Carpooling – consider people who may travel in the same vehicle with the confirmed case
- Eating off site with coworkers
- Break room exposures where masks are removed to eat and drink, and social distancing is not adhered to or there are no barriers in place
- Work celebrations – workplace potlucks and communal food sharing are not permitted. If a workplace potluck or shared meal occurred, consider those in attendance as close contacts.

Question: An employee identified as a close contact tested negative. Can they can return to work?

Close contacts who test negative may not return to work until their required quarantine is over. They must remain at home while in quarantine, or in an [isolation/quarantine hotel](#). Employees who have no COVID-19 immunization protection, partial immunity or full immunity will have different quarantine requirements. This [information sheet](#) outlines the quarantine requirements for immunized close contacts.

Question: Can my employees police themselves?

No. It is the employer’s responsibility to monitor and enforce employee adherence to public health measures that are legally required under the Public Health Act. Employers also have an obligation under OHS to protect workers from hazards by controlling exposure. Workers have the responsibility to follow the employers controls. Employers are responsible to:

- Enforce masking
- Enforce distancing in all work and non-work areas, including break- or change rooms, lunch rooms, and designated smoking areas
- Conduct active symptom screening

Question: Some employees say their symptoms are related to allergies, or other illnesses. Is that okay?

No. Many people believe their symptoms are not related to COVID-19, especially if they are mild. Any new symptoms must be reported. Employees who experience a cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, or loss of taste and smell that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition must report these symptoms.

Translated Resources to Share with Employees

Resources in multiple languages can be shared with employees and posted in the workplace. Visual reminders, like posters demonstrating how to safely use non-medical masks, along with employer monitoring and enforcement, can complement other COVID-19 prevention efforts in the workplace.

The list below includes links to Alberta-based resources translated into several languages most commonly spoken by Albertans, as well as Government of Canada resources in additional languages.

Topic	Sources
Various COVID-19 topics: Mandatory restrictions Health Financial support School Business	Government of Alberta translated resources in 13 languages



<p>Various COVID-19 topics:</p> <p>What is COVID-19? How to prevent COVID-19 What is social/physical distancing and why is it important? When to seek medical attention What to do if you test positive COVID-19 workplace safety What to expect after getting a vaccine</p>	<p>Alberta International Medical Graduate Association (AIMGA) translated videos on COVID-19 education in 17 languages</p>
<p>Financial assistance:</p> <p>Government of Alberta – for Albertans who are unable to work because they are sick, required to isolate, or are caring for someone in isolation</p> <p>COVID-19 financial assistance for newcomers, temporary residents and refugees</p>	<p>Government of Alberta translated resources in 13 languages</p> <p>Government of Canada benefits information translated into 10 languages</p>
<p>Help reduce the spread of COVID-19</p>	<p>Public Health Agency of Canada translated posters in 22 languages</p>
<p>How to safely use a non-medical mask</p>	<p>Government of Alberta translated posters in 7 languages</p> <p>Public Health Agency of Canada translated posters in 22 languages</p>
<p>Workplace safety during the COVID-19 pandemic</p>	<p>Alberta International Medical Graduate Association (AIMGA) translated videos on COVID-19 education in 17 languages</p>
<p>Risk of communal food sharing</p>	<p>Alberta International Medical Graduate Association (AIMGA) translated videos on COVID-19 education in 17 languages</p>
<p>Carpooling during the pandemic</p>	<p>AHS poster in English</p> <p>Filter resources for “carpooling”</p>

Community Contacts to Share with Employees

In addition to HR and/or Workplace Wellness programs employers may have developed to support employees during this pandemic, community agency contacts can be shared with employees to help with:

- Food insecurity
- Income insecurity (assistance with CERB, CRSB and EI)
- Translation services
- Connection with someone who can speak employee first language

North Zone

Organization	Contact information	Services
Grande Prairie Centre for Newcomers	Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/GP-Centre-for-NewcomersCentre-pour-les-Nouveaux-Arrivants-de-GP-282004901838551/ Email: info@gpcn.ca Phone: 780.538.4452	Free and confidential settlement services, including referrals, translation, employment and financial navigation.
YMCA of Northern Alberta Immigrant Services – Wood Buffalo	Website: https://northernalberta.ymca.ca/YMCA-Services/Housing-And-Employment-Services/Immigrant-Services Immigrant Services Manager, Beverly Tjarera Email: beverly.tjarera@northernalberta.ymca.ca Phone: 587.537.5021	Settlement services for newcomers
SENAF – Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray	Website: http://www.lecae.ca/en/ Email: info@lecae.ca Phone: 780.669.6004	Settlement support for Francophone newcomers

Edmonton Zone

Organization	Contact information	Services
Edmonton COVID-19 Rapid Response Collaborative (ECRRC)	Phone: 1.833.738.7727	Emergency support in 31 languages for Edmontonians who have tested positive for COVID-19.

SENAF – Edmonton	Website: http://www.lecae.ca/en/ Email: info@lecae.ca Phone: 780.669.6004	Settlement support for Francophone newcomers
Edmonton Immigrant Services Association	Website: https://www.eisa-edmonton.org/ Phone: 780.474.8445	Settlement support for newcomers, information and referrals
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers	Website: http://emcn.ab.ca/ Email: info@emcn.ab.ca Phone: 780.462.6924 (Welcome Centre for Newcomers)	Settlement support for newcomers
Islamic Family and Social Services Association	Website: https://www.ifssa.ca/ Email: info@ifssa.ca Phone: 780.900.2777 (Help Line 10am–10pm)	Essential needs support (food hampers, household items, etc.), family support, and settlement support for newcomers, regardless of religious affiliation
Catholic Social Services Immigrant and Settlement Services – Edmonton	Website: https://newcomers.cssalberta.ca/ Email: admin@care2centre.ca Phone: 780.424.3545	Settlement support for newcomers
Somali Canadian Cultural Society of Edmonton	Website: https://somaliedmonton.com/ Email: info@somaliedmonton.com Phone: 780.267.7992 (South Edmonton), 780.441.9878 (North Edmonton)	Settlement support for newcomers

Central Zone

Organization	Contact information	Services
Central Alberta Refugee Effort (C.A.R.E.) – Red Deer	Website: http://immigrant-centre.ca/ Email: admin@care2centre.ca Phone: 403.346.8818	Translation and interpretation, information and referrals, settlement support in schools
Catholic Social Services Immigrant and Settlement Services – Lloydminster	Website: https://newcomers.cssalberta.ca/ Email: admin@care2centre.ca Phone: 780.875.9084	Settlement support for newcomers

Catholic Social Services Immigrant and Settlement Services – Red Deer	Website: https://newcomers.cssalberta.ca/ Email: admin@care2centre.ca Phone: 403.346.8818	Settlement support for newcomers
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Calgary Zone

Organization	Contact information	Services
Calgary East Zone Newcomers Collaborative	Website: http://actiondignity.org/calgary-east-zone-newcomers-collaborative/ Phone: 1.833.217.6614	Emergency support in 20 languages for Calgarians living in the NE who have tested positive for COVID-19
Alberta International Medical Graduates Association (AIMGA) HealthHub for Newcomers Phone Line	Phone: 1.833.906.4357	Multilingual vaccine support line
Foothills Community Immigrant Services (High River)	Website: https://www.ccisab.ca/ Email for COVID-19 response: fcisresponse@ccisab.ca Phone: 403.652.5325	Settlement support for newcomers, and language support
Foothills Community Immigrant Services (Okotoks)	Website: https://www.ccisab.ca/ Email for COVID-19 response: fcisresponse@ccisab.ca Phone: 403.938.4699	Settlement support for newcomers, and language support
Foothills Community Immigrant Services (Strathmore)	Website: https://www.ccisab.ca/ Email for COVID-19 response: fcisresponse@ccisab.ca Phone: 403.629.7842	Settlement support for newcomers, and language support
Rockyview Community Immigrant Services (Chestermere, Airdrie, Cochrane)	Website: https://www.ccisab.ca/ Email for COVID-19 response: fcisresponse@ccisab.ca Phone: Chestermere – 403.629.7842 Airdrie and Cochrane – 403.604.2377	Settlement support for newcomers, and language support

Centre for Newcomers (Calgary)	Website: https://www.centrefornewcomers.ca/ Email: info@centrefornewcomers.ca Phone: 403.569.3325	Emergency income support, refugee and settlement services
Immigrant Services Calgary	Website: https://www.immigrantservicescalgary.ca/ Email: info@immigrantservicescalgary.ca Phone: 403.265.1120	Settlement support for newcomers, family support and counselling
Calgary Immigrant Women Association	Website: https://ciwa-online.com/ Email: reception@ciwa-online.com Phone: 403.263.4414	Settlement support for newcomers
Somali Canadians Society	Website: https://www.scscalgary.ca Phone: 403.265.7304	Essential needs support, like culturally fitting food hampers, and translation assistance and new comer assistance for a fee, regardless of religious or cultural affiliation

South Zone

Organization	Contact information	Services
Lethbridge Family Services	Website: https://www.lfsfamily.ca Email for COVID-19 relief for Temporary Foreign Workers: nmacfadyen@lfsfamily.ca Phone: 403.320.1589	Settlement support for newcomers
Saamis Immigration Services Association – Medicine Hat	Website: https://www.saamisimmigration.ca/ Email: info@saamisimmigration.ca Phone: 403.504.1188	Settlement support for newcomers
Brooks and County Immigration Services	Website: https://www.bcis-brooks.ca/ Email: info@bcis-brooks.ca Phone: 403.362.0404	Settlement support for newcomers, and language support