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## **RE: Updated Guidance for Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace**

**To:** Employers in Elgin County, Oxford County, and the City of St. Thomas

Over the past few months, our team has worked hard to vaccinate eligible community members against COVID-19. While we've made tremendous progress, we must remain vigilant and follow public health measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, particularly with COVID-19 Variants of Concern making up more than 70% of active cases. We have seen an increase in workplace transmission of the virus, with outbreaks occurring in a variety of settings.

As a result, I issue this letter to employers and employees of workplaces within Oxford County, Elgin County and the City of St. Thomas to reinforce key public health measures needed to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

### **New Public Health Guidance: Eye Protection**

In response to the evolving situation related to COVID-19 Variants of Concern, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development have added additional personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements within the workplace. Workers are now required to wear both an appropriate face covering (preferably surgical/medical mask) AND eye protection at all times when the worker comes within 2 metres of another individual (indoors and outdoors). Eye protection is not required if other controls are in place, such as keeping a 2 metre distance or having an impermeable barrier (i.e., plexiglass) between the workers.

If an employee does not wear an appropriate face covering and eye protection and comes into contact with a case of COVID-19 while at the workplace, they will be deemed a high-risk contact and will be required to self-isolate for 14 days. As you can imagine, the operational impact of employees being required to self-isolate could be significant. Ensuring employees wear an appropriate face covering and eye protection will protect your business and your employees' health. Our new Eye Protection Guidelines are enclosed for your review.

### **New Workplace Checklist**

Our team has developed a **new workplace checklist** to help you identify public health measures you should take to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and avoid potential outbreaks. This checklist can be found at: <https://app.swpublichealth.ca/Forms/COVID19-workplace-ipac-checklist>

In addition, our **Toolkit for Workplaces** is updated with practical guidance and can be viewed at [www.swpublichealth.ca/workplacetoolkit](http://www.swpublichealth.ca/workplacetoolkit).

## Key Public Health Measures

- Ensure employees are screened for COVID-19 every day before attending work. The workplace screening tool can be found at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/screening/worker/>
  - Workers with any symptom of COVID-19 (even a mild symptom) should self-isolate, not attend work and seek COVID-19 testing. Workers should not return to work until they receive a negative COVID-19 test or until a health care provider makes an alternative diagnosis. Workers who choose not to get a COVID-19 test must self-isolate for 10 days from when their symptoms began and cannot attend work during that time.
- If a member of a worker's household has any symptom of COVID-19, the worker should not attend work until the household member has received a negative COVID-19 test result.
- Inform Southwestern Public Health immediately if you become aware of two or more cases of COVID-19 connected to your workplace within a 14-day interval by calling 1-800-922-0096.
- Allow workers to work from home where reasonably possible.
- Ensure the number of employees on-site is limited so that physical distancing of 2 metres between employees can be maintained. If the work environment cannot be altered to allow 2 metres of physical distancing at all times, provide workers with appropriate personal protective equipment, including medical masks and eye protection.
- Ensure face coverings are used correctly and consistently inside the workplace premises by all employees, patrons and visitors. Face coverings should cover the nose, mouth and chin.
- Employers are required to have a written COVID-19 safety plan on-site as per the Reopening Ontario Act. Guidance on creating your safety plan can be found at [www.ontario.ca/page/develop-your-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan](http://www.ontario.ca/page/develop-your-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan).
- Provide employees with a safe space to take their breaks, allowing for physical distancing between employees when face coverings are removed for eating and drinking.
- Ensure workspaces and high-touch surfaces are cleaned and disinfected regularly, and that alcohol-based hand sanitizer is available and accessible to employees throughout the premises.
- Conduct, or have the property owner or landlord conduct a regular review of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in the workplace to ensure they are in good working order.

## Additional Resources

We suggest you become familiar with the regulatory requirements impacting businesses and organizations outlined below.

- Occupational Health and Safety Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1 (king.ca)
- Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020: Provincewide Shutdown: O. Reg. 82/20

If you have questions, or need support, please reach out to us or contact Ontario Ministry supports.

- Southwestern Public Health Website: [www.swpublichealth.ca](http://www.swpublichealth.ca)
- Southwestern Public Health COVID-19 Response Centre: 1-800-922-0096 Ext. 9
- Ontario's 'Stop the Spread Business Information Line': 1-888-444-3659
- Ontario Ministry of Labour: [www.labour.gov.on.ca](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca)

We are all ready for this pandemic to come to an end, and the end is in sight. Please do your part and follow public health measures to protect the community we love.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joyce Lock, MD, MSC, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health  
Southwestern Public Health