

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Workplace Outbreak Management

Recommendations

January 5, 2021

Version 2.0

Outbreak Definition

As per the *Infectious Diseases Protocol*, the outbreak case definition varies with the outbreak under investigation and should be established by Southwestern Public Health (SWPH).

An outbreak in a workplace exists under the following criteria:

- Two or more laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases with an epidemiological link in the workplace (e.g. same work area, same shift) within a 14-day period where both cases could have reasonably* acquired their infection in the workplace

* Examples of reasonably having acquired infection in the workplace include:

- No obvious source of infection outside of the workplace; or
- Known exposure in the workplace

Outbreak Identification

SWPH may identify potential outbreaks through various means, such as:

- Identification of a case or cases associated with a workplace
- Complaints of illness at a workplace from employees
- Request for assistance from an employer
- Information received through the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD), such as a referral from a workplace complainant
- Notification through other ministries, provincial, or federal partners

1.0 Promote Safety Measures for Transportation to, from, and for Work

1.1 Limit carpooling where possible

- Employers should not support carpooling for work-related transportation when there are cases present in the workplace or the community.
- Among employees who would normally carpool to and from work, encourage them to limit their carpooling where possible.

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- If carpooling must take place, the following are required:
 - The number of occupants in the vehicle should be limited. The number of occupants is dependent on the vehicle type. For example, cars should be limited to two occupants (one driver, one passenger in the back seat opposite the driver). Vans should be limited based on the number of rows of seating. For example, if the van has three rows of seating, there should be no more than three occupants (one per row), with each sitting in a “zig-zag” pattern from left-to-right-to-left inside the vehicle.
 - All occupants carpooling must wear face coverings covering the nose, mouth and chin.
 - The vehicle windows should be kept open during the drive to create airflow throughout the vehicle.
 - The vehicle should be disinfected regularly (particularly high-touch hard surfaces, like door handles, seatbelt buckles, and steering wheel) using a disinfectant solution that has an 8-digit drug identification number (DIN) approved by Health Canada.
- Note that any individual planning to carpool should use the [Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) prior to carpooling to identify whether they have symptoms/need to self-isolate at home.
- Employers must compile a log of employees who are carpooling together, including those who live together in the same household and those who do not live together in the same household.
- Employers should consider offering support to employees to access other forms of transportation to prevent carpooling. For example, cover taxi or transportation costs and/or rent a bus to allow multiple riders, if riders can be spaced out to ensure physical distancing, as noted below.

1.2 Adjust shuttle service times and arrangements (if applicable)

- If the employer offers shuttle bus services for their employees, some adjustments may need to be made to allow for physical distancing of 2 metres between individuals. Adjustments include:
 - Limiting rider capacity.
 - Offering additional shuttle times to allow for limited rider capacity; and
 - Stagger seating to maintain physical distancing, as noted above for vans.

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- All shuttle bus riders must wear face coverings and sanitize their hands before entering the bus. The employer must provide the face coverings and hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol content).
- Shuttle buses should be properly sanitized after drop-off using a disinfectant solution with an 8-digit drug identification number (DIN) approved by Health Canada.
- Employers must compile a log of employees who are using the shuttle service.

1.3 Limit entry as feasible and when applicable

- Prohibit all unnecessary personnel from entering the facility.
- Decrease the number of entrances into the facility to ensure all persons, including essential visitors, are directed to an established screening area.
- Ensure all employees know to stay home if they think they have COVID-19 symptoms and report if they have symptoms while at work. Employees should be made aware of the [Ministry of Health's COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) and asked to use it prior to coming into work or carpooling (if applicable) to identify any symptoms/whether they need to self-isolate at home. Please note, household members of individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 awaiting test results should also [self-isolate at home](#) until test results are negative.
- A log and contact information should be maintained for all employees and other essential visitors that enter the building.

1.4 Operate daily screening stations

- Workplaces must screen all employees and essential visitors for COVID-19 prior to or when entering the workplace. More information on screening requirements can be [found here](#).
- Screening stations should be established at each entrance of the facility to allow for the screening of employees and other essential visitors before they enter the facility, daily/at the start of each shift.
- Screening stations should be set-up to allow for the physical distancing of 2 metres between individuals. Employers may choose to place distance markings on the ground to assist with this. Assign screeners to each station.

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- Screening stations should be equipped with:
 - **Signage** to help employees/other essential visitors identify whether they have COVID-19 symptoms and whether they should enter the workplace
 - Thermometer or infrared camera for checking temperatures
 - Screening questions/COVID-19 self-assessment tool
 - Hand washing station (equipped with soap, single-use towels, and warm, running water) and/or hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol)
 - Face coverings
 - An assigned screener that is familiar with COVID-19 symptoms
- Employers should establish a plan for screening during inclement weather if screening stations are outside. For example, portable tents could be set-up if it rains. An employer may also wish to install physical barriers, such as plexiglass or similar, at each screening station to protect assigned screeners. If screeners come within 2 metres of individuals not wearing a face covering and there is no plexiglass barrier, additional PPE covering the eyes, nose and mouth should be worn to protect the worker (i.e. a medical mask and goggles/face shield).
- All individuals in the screening que, including assigned screeners, should wear face coverings and clean/sanitize their hands with the materials provided.
- Assigned screeners should:
 - Check temperatures of employees and other essential visitors at the start of each shift/upon entry to identify anyone with a fever of 37.8 degrees Celsius or greater.
 - Use the COVID-19 self-assessment tool to ask questions and identify whether there are any COVID-19 symptoms present.
- Anyone with a fever of 37.8 degrees Celsius or greater, or that has any COVID-19 symptoms, should not be permitted into the facility and must self-isolate at home. Employers should establish a rapid response plan for when an employee or essential visitor fails the screening process. A rapid response plan may include:
 - Denying entry to essential visitors that fail the screening process and potentially informing their employer, where applicable.
 - Establishing a secondary screening area and separate exit from the entryway for employees that fail the initial screening, to protect their privacy and to protect other employees that are starting their shift.
 - Providing clear information and ongoing communications to employees who failed the screening process about: isolation requirements, testing, etc.

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- Collecting the following information from flagged employees: close contacts (for contact-tracing purposes), types of symptoms experienced, date of symptom onset, location of workstation(s), days worked with symptoms and prior to symptom onset, etc.
- Consider implementing the above screening process at the end of shifts.
- Ensure that staff know that they must inform their manager immediately if they are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms during their shift. Management should be prepared to have a rapid response plan for those that identify symptoms during their shift. See above for some suggested actions to include in the rapid response plan.

2.0 Implement Safety Controls During Shifts and Breaks

2.1 Adjust shift times and workspace arrangements to allow for physical distancing

- Stagger shift start times to prevent overlap/congestion of staff.
- Establish consistent groups of workers for each shift and/or alter shift schedules so that the same groups of workers are always assigned to the same shifts, within the same locations. This is known as “cohorting” and can reduce the spread of COVID-19 by minimizing the number of different individuals who come into close contact with each other. Cohorting may also reduce the number of workers quarantined should exposure to COVID-19 occur.
- Configure communal workspaces/production lines so that workers are maintaining a physical distance of at least 2 metres from each other on each side, and ideally front and back (four square metres/36 square feet total). Ideally, modify workstations so that workers do not face one another. Consider using markings and signs to remind workers to maintain their location at their station, away from each other.
- Install barriers, such as plexiglass or similar, in workspace areas where physical distancing cannot always be maintained. Such barriers should be installed between adjacent positions on the same line, including areas where employees work side-by-side, as well as areas where employees work across from one another. Please see our [Guidance on Physical Barriers](#) for information on constructing barriers.
- In larger facilities with automated lines, spacing options may be more challenging and may have to be more creative (e.g. move some processing lines to other areas of the facility).

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- For workstations that do not allow for the installation of barriers and where physical distancing is not possible, all staff are required to wear a medical mask AND face shields.
- Where possible, promote one-way traffic. Use visuals, such as markings on floors or walls, and/or barriers to direct traffic.
- Remove non-essential interior doors to enable no-touch hallways and maintain physical distancing.
- Establish “drop boxes” for contactless delivery/receiving of manifests, shipments, etc.
- Assign a quality assurance person, supervisor, or other trained staff to help direct traffic and monitor correct physical distancing in the workspace, including areas where congestion is likely to occur. Areas where congestion may occur include:
 - Entrances or timecard registers, especially at the start and end of shifts and breaks
 - Handwashing or sanitization stations
 - Screening area
 - Office spaces
 - Change rooms/locker rooms
 - Lunchrooms
 - Processing areas (including workstations within areas)
 - Packaging area
 - Shipping/receiving area
 - Warehouses
 - Hallways
 - Stairwells
 - Conference rooms
 - Any ‘common area’ (i.e. lobby, atrium)
- Ensure adequate ventilation and ensure air does not blow directly from one worker to another worker. If fans are removed, remain aware and take steps to prevent health hazards as applicable.
- Employers may determine that it is necessary to alter further or reduce production shifts, adjust production operating hours, and discourage employees from coming into work too early/congregating to maintain the noted measures to help protect against COVID-19.

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2.2 Adjust lunch/break times and space arrangements to allow for physical distancing

- Stagger break start times to prevent overlap/congestion of staff. Establish a plan to reduce or manage congestion effectively. For example, the production line speed could be slowed during break time to accommodate one half of the floor going on break at any given time.
- Expand lunch/break room space temporarily to allow for physical distancing of 2 metres between individuals. For example, set-up tents and tables outdoors if appropriate.
- Install physical barriers, such as plexiglass or similar, on lunch/break tables. Arrange tables so that they are at least 2 metres apart.
- Stagger seating at the tables to prevent people from directly facing each other; i.e. in a triangle formation.
- Space out commonly used appliances (e.g., microwaves, toasters, etc.) in lunch/break rooms such that they are at least two (2) metres or six (6) feet apart.
- Remove/reduce communal tools (e.g., knives).
- Remove/shut down other communal items such as vending machines, ice machines, and water coolers.
- If a cafeteria is onsite, either re-structure it to allow for “grab-and-go” meals or close the cafeteria.

2.3 Adjust locker room and washroom arrangements to allow for physical distancing

- Locker rooms and corridors should promote one-way flow and no loitering (e.g., separate entry and exit doors). Employers may wish to install barriers to promote one-way flow or use directional arrows on walls/floors.
- Employers may need to reconfigure locker assignments to allow for the physical distancing of 2 metres between individuals. This may include re-assigning lockers/ensuring that employees on the same shift do not have lockers beside each other.
- Employers may need to close locker room showers (if applicable) if they cannot be cleaned after each use.
- Physical barriers or dividers should be placed between washroom urinals. If this is not possible, then only every other urinal (if aligned in a row) should be decommissioned/closed off for use.

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- Establish a capacity limit for locker rooms and washrooms to allow for physical distancing of two (2) metres or six (6) feet between individuals. Assign a quality assurance person, supervisor, or other trained staff to monitor this.
- In the event of line-ups, place markings on the floor when possible to indicate appropriate spacing for the line (i.e., spacing of two metres or six feet).

2.4 Implement enhanced cleaning/disinfection practices in all workspaces and common areas

- Establish an extra cleaning shift during production to increase the frequency of cleaning/sanitization/disinfection. Develop and maintain a checklist to verify that equipment, common areas, and high-touch surfaces (e.g., clipboards, workplace tools, etc.) are being cleaned with increased frequency.
- All common areas require increased disinfectant levels. The disinfectant solution must have an 8-digit drug identification number (DIN) approved by Health Canada. This indicates that it is effective against COVID-19.
 - Disinfect high touch surface areas more frequently (i.e., two times per shift at a minimum), such as:
 - Doorknobs, handles, rails, etc.
 - Washroom doors, handles, faucets, etc.
 - Locker rooms (clean showers after use or close showers after use); and
 - Office equipment (e.g., calculators, phones, etc.).
 - Disinfect lunch/break rooms after breaks, including tables, dividers, chairs, microwaves, etc.
- Disinfectants are meant to be used to clean surfaces. Ensure there is a process in place to verify appropriate concentration levels if the disinfectant is not already pre-mixed. Always read and follow manufacturers' instructions for safe use (e.g., wear gloves and use in well-ventilated area).

2.5 Increase ventilation where possible

- Open windows if possible and if the weather permits.
- Move work outside when possible.

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3.0 Support Good Hand Hygiene and Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) within Facility

3.1 Ensure adequate supply and proper use of PPE and face coverings.

- Establish a system for procuring/ensuring an adequate supply of PPE and face coverings. This may include include gloves, plant clothing/gowns, medical masks, face shields and face coverings. The employer should conduct weekly assessments of the PPE and face covering inventory on site and the quantities required to operate weekly. If required, refer to the Province of Ontario workplace PPE directory for support.
- Face coverings (to be provided by the facility) must be worn by all person entering the facility, including employees, contractors, shipping/receiving personnel, drivers, and any other essential visitor.
- Medical masks AND face shields (to be provided by the facility) must be worn by all employees working in areas where barriers and physical distancing of 2 metres between workers is not possible.
- Provide education on the proper use of face coverings and proper donning/doffing of PPE. The employer should assign a quality assurance person(s), supervisors, or other trained staff need to ensure proper masking procedures, as well as determine if more education and communication is required. Procedures include thoroughly washing hands before putting face coverings on, if the individual accidentally touches their face covering, and after taking the face covering off. View our [video on how to properly put on and take off a face covering](#).
- Keep all employees informed about public health advice applicable to the workplace.
- Face coverings may need to be changed throughout the day, based on the manufacturers' direction for use and the type of environment it is exposed to in the facility. For example, face coverings that become visibly soiled/damp, are damaged, and/or are difficult to breathe through must be discarded and replaced. Face coverings should also be discarded before beginning break/lunch and replaced afterwards.

3.2 Provide adequate hand washing materials in key areas of the facility

- Provide increased access to hand hygiene facilities. Ensure that a hand washing station (equipped with soap, single-use towels, and warm, running water) and/or hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) is at every entrance to the facility, in each workspace, and in break/locker rooms and washrooms. Establish if there is a need to install more hand

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washing stations or hand sanitizers for adequate hand washing, and to ensure that physical distancing of 2 metres between workers can be maintained.

- Have a quality assurance person, supervisor, or other trained staff monitor hand wash areas during shift start/finish and break start/finish, to ensure that all employees are maintaining physical distancing and adequately washing their hands.
- Ensure handwashing materials are accessible for employees/clients with disabilities or other accommodation needs.
- Post signage prompting employees on how to properly **wash** and **sanitize** hands.

4.0 Maintain Communications

4.1 Ensure open, clear, and regular communications about the facilities' response to COVID-19

- Communicate to employees that management is there to support employees and ensure they are safe in the workplace. Regular communication between the facilities' Joint Health and Safety Committee and the Ministry of Labour is encouraged.
- Deliver concrete messages (oral and written) about how management will support employees during COVID-19. Use plain language and, where possible, languages that are primarily spoken or read by employees. Consider sharing educational videos to help deliver important COVID-19 information.
- Ensure employees are aware of any organizational policies and procedures that will be implemented within the facility to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Policies/procedures should cover how the workplace will operate, including: the sanitization/disinfection of the workplace, how workers report illnesses, how to ensure physical distancing, how work will be scheduled, and screening measures.
- Establish mechanisms for regularly sharing and answering questions, providing up-to-date information, etc. This could involve setting-up a special phone line or email address, hosting town hall meetings or daily huddles (with physical distancing measures maintained), using social media, and/or sending email newsletters.
- Display accessible posters/fact sheets that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, physical distancing, cleaning work surfaces often, and proper hand hygiene practices, etc. Posters/fact sheets could be placed at entrances, break areas, locker rooms, and other work areas where they are likely to be seen. Ensure signage is appropriate for employees' age, ability, reading level, and language preferences. Helpful posters and fact sheets translated in multiple languages (e.g.,

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Arabic, Simplified Chinese, Farsi, French, Spanish, etc.) can be found on the Health Canada website.

- Encourage staff to use the COVID-19 self-assessment tool to ensure they do not have any symptoms present/and or requirement to self-isolate at home.
- Ensure all employees know to stay home if they think they have COVID-19 symptoms, and report if they have symptoms while at work. Employees should be made aware of any procedures for reporting symptoms to management.
- Ensure employees know that they should also **self-isolate** if a member of their household has symptoms of COVID-19 and is awaiting test results until the test results come back are negative. If results are positive, the employee will need to self-isolate for a period of time as directed by Public Health.
- Provide consistent one-on-one or small group communication about isolation requirements, testing, importance of not coming into the workplace when ill, importance of informing supervisor if COVID-19 symptoms develop while working, importance of maintaining physical distancing outside the workplace. It is important to establish a trusting environment and ensure employees are aware they will not be penalized for not working if they have symptoms.
- The employer may need to explore translation services or the use of another employee to aid with communication and ensure all employees understand what is being communicated.
- Ensure employees who need to be absent from work due to illness or being a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case are supported:(e.g. consider adjusting personal/sick leave policies to enable employees to stay home when ill, undergoing COVID-19 testing, self-isolating, or if they are taking care of children or someone who is ill)

4.2 Consider sharing information about and/or offering additional supports that can help employees during these times

- Consider providing cloth masks for employees and households to use when in the community.
- Explain the risks of communal food sharing both during lunch breaks and at home.
- Support and encourage employees to take care of their mental health. Consider sharing about mental health supports that are available in Ontario free of charge.
- When applicable, share information about immigrant support services that are available.

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4.3 Ensure contact information is properly documented and up-to-date for all employees, contractors, and volunteers (if applicable)

- Collect and maintain the following information from staff, contractors, and volunteers (if applicable):
 - Up-to-date cell phone numbers (Consider a messaging application for mobile phones; ask individuals what works best).
 - Email addresses (if available)
 - First language spoken (even if it is English as this becomes important as it pertains to education, customs, and social supports)
 - Immigration status (e.g., Temporary/work permit holders, Permanent Resident, or Citizen. Status determines eligibility for financial benefits at a provincial and federal level and subsequent language support).
- Have the ability to compile/maintain and provide daily a line list to Public Health, if required, for those employees who present COVID-19 symptoms to indicate:
 - Date of onset
 - Area/line individual(s) work in
 - Shift worked (AM/PM)
 - Position worked on last day
 - Last day worked
 - Date tested
 - Test results
 - Detailed contact tracing
 - Carpooling details
 - Employees who reside together/temporary foreign workers/other facility housing
- Maintain a daily log for all other essential visitors, contractors, volunteers (if applicable) that enter the facility. At a minimum name, dates and times of entry, places accessed within the facility, and contact information should be documented. Ensure the log can be easily accessed.
- Communicate any other necessary information requested by Public Health regarding symptomatic employees (e.g., employee date of birth, ability to self-isolate, presence or roommates or other household members) to assist with testing/case management.
- Having the above information will assist Public Health with close-contact tracing and communication about self-isolation requirements and other case management measures

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should someone in the facility fall ill with COVID-19, or come into close contact with a person that has tested positive for COVID-19.

- Maintain confidentiality of employees' personal health information.

5.0 Physical Distancing Measures for Meat Processors

- To support physical distancing measures of 2 metres between individuals on the meat processing line, meat should be spaced out according to size. The following are some options for supporting physical distancing:
 - Large animal (beef, bison) line options
 - Decrease line speed to allow for less employees on the line
 - Increase operating hours to allow for staggered shifts and/or make up for decreased line speed
 - Medium/small animal (pork, chicken, turkey) line options
 - Decrease line speed
 - Hang meat on every second or third hook
 - Increase number of operating hours/shifts

6.0 Other Considerations

- Plant size: # of employees, square footage of areas e.g. processing, cafeteria, locker rooms etc.
- Type of food processed and the typical output/day
- # of days of the week in operation
- # shifts/day and start/stop time – is there overlap?
- # of employees on each shift
- # of employees in each work area
- Do employees rotate shifts? Rotate work areas? Rotate within the work area?
- Languages spoken in the facility
- Is there an overnight cleaning shift?
- Work areas: i.e. processing, packaging, shipping/receiving, numbered areas
- Facility map/schematic available for all areas
- Is there any worker housing?
- Drivers: employees or third party or is carpooling occurring?

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- Information can be obtained or is maintained for all third party/contractors on site (maintenance, security, cleaners, deliveries, etc.) What jobs are /were undertaken recently and where in the facility and when
- Is there production occurring in same building? Numerous buildings? Employee flow between buildings?
- Family/shared accommodations?

7.0 Key Resources

1. Ministry of Labour: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/food-manufacturing-and-processing-health-and-safety-during-covid-19>
2. Ministry of Health Self-Assessment Tool: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/> Public Health Ontario COVID19 Public Resources: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/public-resources>
3. Public Health Ontario Proper hand hygiene: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-covid-19-hand-hygiene.pdf?la=en>
4. Public Health Ontario Fact Sheet for Donning and Doffing PPE : <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/ipac/ppe-recommended-steps.pdf?la=en>
5. Public Health Ontario - Masking for source control for non health care workers: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/ipac/report-covid-19-masking-source-control-workers-non-healthcare-settings.pdf?la=en>
6. Public Health Ontario – Mask Use for Non-Healthcare workers <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/2020/05/factsheet-covid-19-masks-not-healthcare.pdf?la=en>
7. Public Health Ontario – How to Wear a Mask: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-covid-19-how-to-wear-mask.pdf?la=en>
8. Public Health Ontario – Physical Distancing: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-covid-19-guide-physical-distancing.pdf?la=en>
9. Health Canada – Disinfectants: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html#tbl1>
10. CFIA expectations for the prevention of and response to suspect and confirmed cases of COVID-19 by Meat Slaughter and Processing Establishments:

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<https://www.inspection.gc.ca/covid-19/cfia-information-for-industry/cfia-expectations-for-the-prevention-of-and-respon/eng/1585620151816/1585620617343>

11. CDC – PPE use calculator: Ontario: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/burn-calculator.html>

12. CDC - Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers: Interim Guidance from CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA):
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html>

13. Alberta Medical International Graduates translation webpage: <https://aimga.ca/covid-19/>

14. Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance Workplace Outbreaks:
https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_workplace_outbreak_guidance.pdf

15. Government of Canada – Risk mitigation tool for workplaces/businesses operating during the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-informed-decision-making-workplaces-businesses-covid-19-pandemic.html>

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