COVID-19 Workplace Health & Safety Toolkit

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1.0   Introduction

This toolkit provides a framework on how to prioritize and select workplace health and safety controls for re-design and/or continuation of services during the active COVID-19 pandemic. This document is intended to guide administration and office settings, understanding that EWEMS, EWSWA and SPH have strict protocols already in place under regulation.

2.0   What is COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) and how does it spread?

COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is a NEW coronavirus, which is part of a large family of viruses. The virus was discovered in January of 2020, as it was identified as the cause of an outbreak of pneumonia originating in Wuhan, China. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization classified COVID-19 as a pandemic.

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For viruses like COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2), the science community believes that the virus is primarily spread through close contact and respiratory droplets (including on surfaces).

While there is research being completed on how long the droplets of various sizes can remain in the air; at this time, authorities still consider this to be a close contact, droplet transmitted disease. The virus is new, so we are learning new things every week based on research and case data analysis from around the world. The County will apply the precautionary principle when assessing and controlling the hazard of COVID-19 in the workplace.

[See the Government of Canada poster – About Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)](#) - this can be posted on Health and Safety Boards.

3.0   Hierarchy of Controls: COVID-19 Pandemic

This fundamental concept of occupational health and safety control measures applies to all hazards, including biohazards like the COVID-19 virus. Controls should be considered in order of preference on the hierarchy – i.e. elimination first, PPE last.
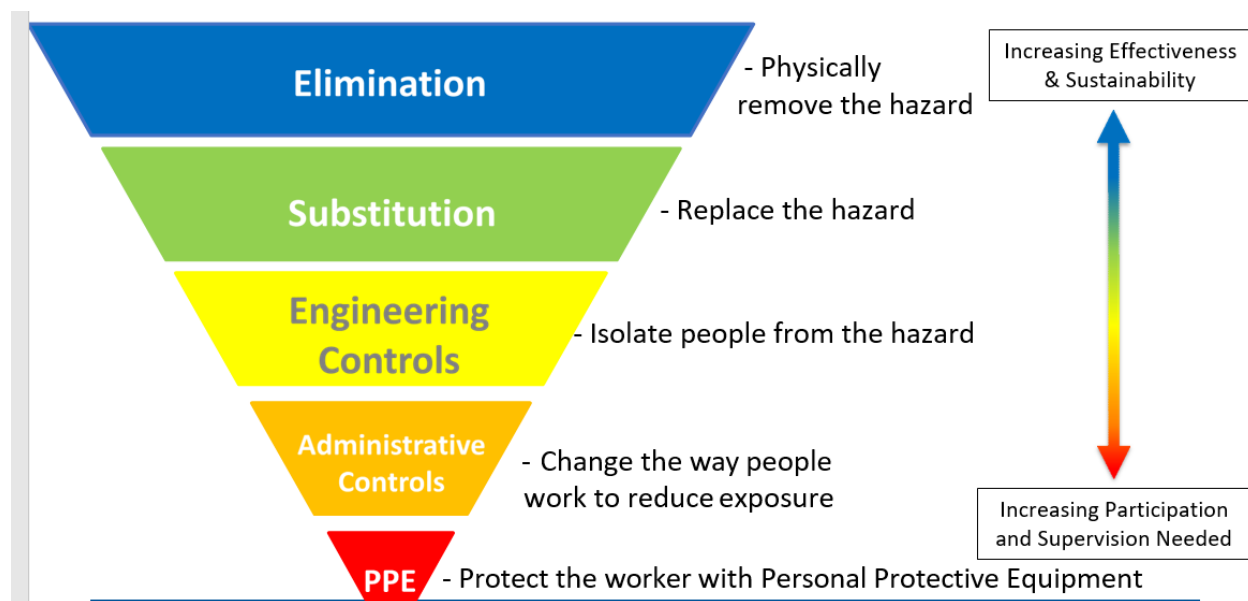
Elimination	• Work from home if possible
	• Stay home as much as possible; physical distance from others
Substitution	• Work from home if possible

	• Work in the office on a rotating basis (in the office 1x per week, etc.)
Engineering Controls	• Ventilation – Increase fresh air flow, open windows, filters/MERV • Sneeze guards, partitions and other physical barriers, hand hygiene stations • Cashless payment equipment • Use of non-medical masks to contain droplets (source control) • Office layout/design changes • Paperless technology
Administrative Controls	• Maintain 2m of physical distancing • Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces • Occupancy limits • Stagger schedules/meet virtually • Hand hygiene practices • Passive and Active Screening • Procedures/protocols/posters/floor decals • Checklists • Mental Wellness Programs • Use of non-medical masks
PPE	• If 2m distance cannot be maintained and physical barriers are not feasible, then consider PPE: o Surgical masks, face shields, disposable gloves, work clothing, etc.

4.0 Elimination of Exposure to Hazard: Working from Home

While government restrictions may be easing to open up our economy out of necessity, we are still dealing with an active pandemic. Elimination of exposure to the hazard using a work-from-home strategy or rotation in the office, where possible, remains an effective means of preventing exposure. Please refer to the County's Work-from-home Protocol.

5.0   Engineering Controls: Workplace Ventilation

Previous studies on influenza have shown that increased ventilation/fresh air reduces transmission of viruses.

- Increased fresh air/air exchange, disperses microparticles.

- In many commercial/large building heating and cooling systems, a portion of the air is re-circulated and the remainder is pulled in from outdoors.

- Other buildings simply recirculate the air through the furnace/air handler. For commercial systems, increase fresh air supply and for smaller forced air systems, open windows to increase fresh air.

6.0   Engineering Controls: Barriers/Droplet Guards

In the context of a virus, physical distancing is generally a preferred control measure; however, effective barriers (such as cubicle partitions or reception barriers) are appropriate when 2m of distance is not feasible.

Patrons should only approach a counter when called upon and should be asked to step back to 2m whenever possible. If possible, staff should step back when patron approaches.

Even with a barrier, it is best to keep duration of close contact to a minimum.

Barriers should be an adequate size to provide coverage in the working position – Barriers must be large enough to create an effective barrier between the breathing zones of the people on each side. The breathing zone has an area of about 60cm, which means it extends 30cm in every direction from the person's nose. The barrier must accommodate tallest and shortest people. Openings for document exchange or payment terminals, must not be in the breathing zone of either person.

It is important that any barrier installed does not impede ventilation (fundamental COVID-19 control) or emergency egress. Floor decals should also be used to indicate proper spacing in the event of queues.

7.0   Administrative Controls: Physical Distance

Even though physical distancing is classified as an administrative control, this is only because it requires an action by the worker. This control measure can be one of the most effective (besides elimination) in the context of infectious respiratory viruses like COVID-19. Everyone needs to commit to physical distancing as a rule. That person you are standing beside may be infected and contagious, even though they are not showing symptoms.

Practice physical distancing (stay at least 2 m away from others).
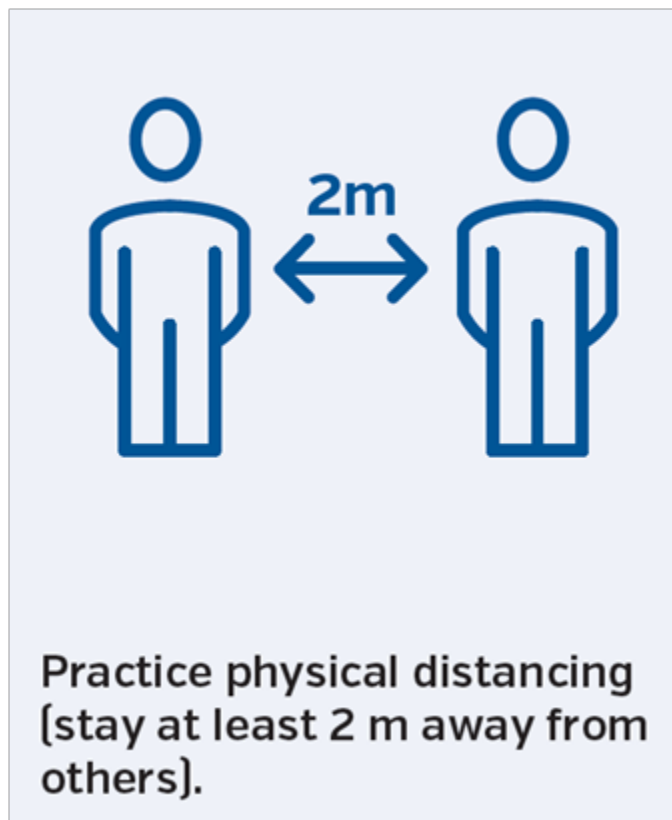
8.0   Administrative Controls: Physical Distancing – Office Layout Considerations

Keep only the minimum amount of staff in an area as necessary.

While maintaining 2m of physical distancing reduces risk substantially, greater distance is even more beneficial for longer duration (depending on droplet size and air flow in area).

Separate work stations by 4 metres wherever feasible, but always ensure a minimum of 2 metres between workers (including when accessing their work station). This can also be achieved via scheduling.

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Position work stations so that one staff member does not face another staff member.

Where there's a commonly used walkway beside a work station, the work station should be moved to allow for 2m of distancing – if this is not feasible, a barrier may be placed to separate the worker from the walkway.

Workplace layout/re-design can also be considered an engineering control.
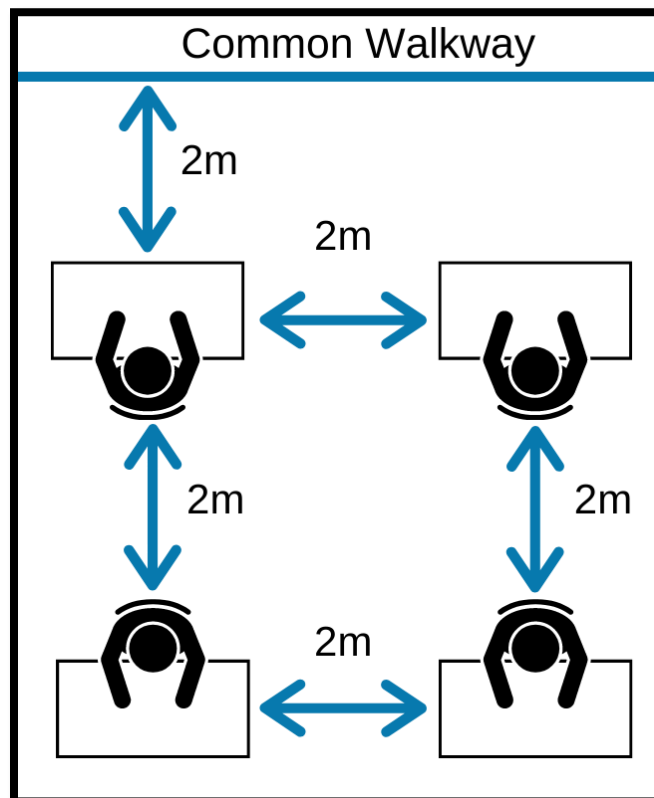
9.0 Administrative Controls: Physical Distancing – Office Occupancy and Planning

9.1 **Use the 4 square metre rule.**

Where physical barriers are not present (i.e. office partitioning), a helpful method is to establish a maximum # of persons based on floor area. Calculate the total floor space in the office area, then subtract an estimate of the area for furniture or unusable space:

- Arrange the office space so that there is a maximum of 1 person for every 4 square meters.

- Consider how staff will access and egress their workstation – plan to avoid challenges to 2 metres of physical distancing. Many hallways and passage ways will challenge physical distancing requirements without measures in place.
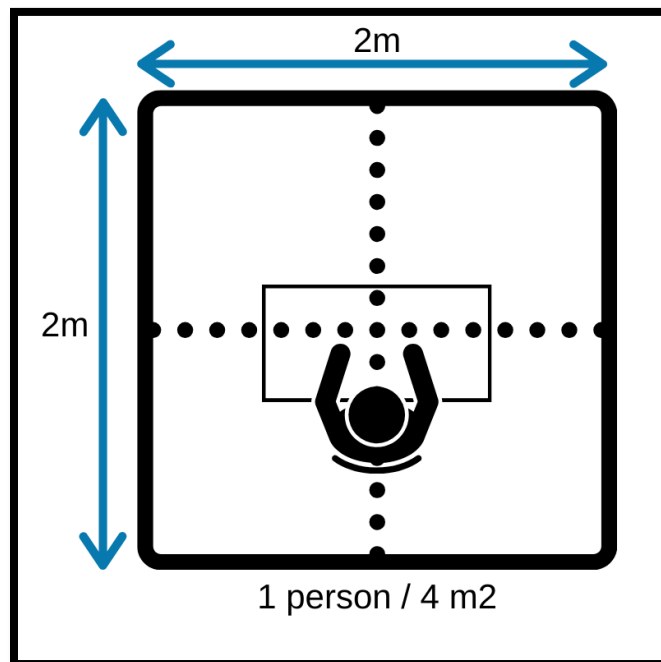
- Where hallways and passageways or common areas (i.e.: washrooms, stairwell, lobby) present a challenge to physical distancing, staff should wear non-surgical masks when passing/attending these areas.

- The calculation should be done for each office area, not to establish a total building occupancy limit.

2m

2m

1 person / 4 m2

10.0   Administrative Controls: Physical Distancing – Crowd Control/Flow of People

Our workplaces should have an easy to see flow of pedestrian traffic to further promote physical distancing. Consider removing equipment that may promote people gathering in common areas (chairs, other shared equipment).

- Keep doors open/automatic to reduce high traffic touch points.

- Consider having dedicated entry doors and dedicated exit doors, both into interior office areas and to and from the outdoors.

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- If physical distancing cannot be maintained, staff should wear non-surgical masks, such as in the stairwells.

- Calculate the m2 area of the spaces where patrons may need to line up/access (publicly accessible areas). Use floor decals.

- Consider the removal of small reception areas where physical distancing of 2m cannot be done (e.g. HR reception, Admin, etc.)

11.0　Administrative Controls: Physical Distancing – Employee Rotation/Scheduling

If staff cannot work from home, rotate and schedule staff to ensure the minimum amount of staff required are in a facility at one time.

- Stagger lunch breaks.

- Remove common utensils from kitchenettes; Bring your own cutlery and plates.

- Sanitize/wash your hands before and after using shared kitchen appliances (coffee makers, fridges, etc.).

- Staff should wipe down shared kitchen appliances after each use with a disinfectant.

- Ensure kitchen appliances and surfaces are included in the 3x per day high traffic touch point disinfection protocol.

12.0　Administrative Controls: Physical Distancing – Washrooms

Washrooms may result in challenges to physical distancing, if not controlled; use signage for one person at a time usage, if capacity is a concern.

Washrooms are a high traffic touch point and must be disinfected 3x per day (at a minimum). Where cleaners are not present, Services must arrange for staff members to conduct the required disinfection. Each washroom should have the area measured in square meters. The washroom occupancy should be limited to a maximum of 1 person/4m2 (consider this also for washroom/change room combinations). This limit should be posted at the entry point, with physical distancing messaging.

Alternatively, a bathroom can be limited to 1 person at a time and non-surgical masks should be worn in washrooms/common areas where physical distancing is not possible.

If possible, air exchanges should be increased in washrooms. Some research suggests that paper towel drying is preferred over hot air or jet dryers (wiping action further reduces contaminants); there's also concerns that some dryers may aerosolize contaminants into the air if the hands were not cleaned properly. Consider installing paper towel dispensers to use instead of dryers.

13.0   Administrative Controls: Personal Protective Equipment: Use of Surgical Style Masks

The County encourages use of non-medical masks in its facilities and it is mandatory in vehicles where two or more occupants that cannot be separated by 2m or a physical barrier. For facilities where physical distancing is foreseen to be a challenge, masks may be required in common areas.

Staff should wear non-surgical masks when traveling from their work areas to other common areas of the facility, such as the bathrooms, kitchenettes, break rooms and meeting rooms or when visiting other office areas.

If staff have to do a short-term activity within 2m of each other, non-surgical masks must be worn by both employees. Mask use in this manner should not replace physical distancing.

The primary way in which masks or face coverings prevent the spread, is through source control – Others are protected from the wearer's respiratory droplets; they are contained.

The County is providing non-surgical style masks for workers – supervisors are to ensure these are provided to staff.

Regular hand washing, and hand hygiene is an effective way to combat the spread of the virus. Staff are encouraged to wash their hands or use an alcohol-based sanitizer regularly.

14.0   Administrative Controls: Information Posters

Information posters are used during an active pandemic to remind visitors (including staff and patrons) to assess themselves prior to entry and follow public health guidelines.

- To be posted at all workplace entrances and locations;

- To be used with facility-specific instructions, where required;

- Communications to create/distribute posters as needed.

- [Information Posters]

15.0   Administrative Controls: Active Screening for Staff

Staff are required to submit their active screening form daily, provide by eSolutions, whether working at a County facility or offsite location. (Active screening for SPH staff and EMS paramedics are similar but are being captured using other formats/technologies).

16.0   Administrative Controls: COVID-19 Safety Policies/Guidelines for the County of Essex

Workers needs to have easy access to corporate policies and guidelines regarding their health and safety at work.

- The Safety Guidelines and Measures for Workers During Covid-19 Pandemic should be posted in a conspicuous location of the workplace;

- The Guidelines are updated periodically as the pandemic evolves and new research and guidelines are becoming available;

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- COVID-19 policy posting is a requirement in Ministry of Labour Guidelines.

- There is an approved COE procedure that addresses a potential positive or suspected COVID worker case.

17.0   Administrative Controls: Meetings

In-person, indoor meetings are not recommended during the pandemic; Avoid holding in-person meetings unless absolutely necessary.

- Consider using virtual means or teleconferencing to hold a meeting at a distance;

- Hold meetings outside or in large open areas;

- Maintain physical distancing and consider wearing non-surgical masks when person to person meetings must occur;

- Remove extra chairs to ensure physical distancing.

18.0   Administrative Controls: Hygiene Considerations

Our facilities need to be set up in ways to encourage proper hygiene considerations.

- Hygiene stations must be placed at every facility entry point – Passive screening prompts to perform hand hygiene upon entry;

- Hand washing stations / hand sanitizer should be placed at high volume areas to encourage use;

- Signage detailing proper cough etiquette and hand hygiene should be posted around the workplace;

- Employees should continue to be encouraged to avoid touching their face.

19.0   Administrative Controls: Enhanced Cleaning/Disinfecting

Employees must be trained in cleaning and disinfecting, including the safe use of chemicals for their own workstations and when using common areas.

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- Each department should create checklists that identify areas that should be cleaned/disinfected frequently; Allows for record of cleaning in areas as well for future use;

- Areas that are High traffic touch points (door knobs, hand rails, elevator buttons, light switches, faucet handles, fuel pumps, etc.) and shared surfaces should be identified and disinfected 3 times per day;

- Sharing of surfaces / equipment in the Civic Centre Offices /Administration offices are discouraged and must be disinfected between users. Staff are required to wipe down equipment after each use.

- If an employee is a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19, staff should follow the County's COVID-19 protocols and procedures. Protocols and procedures are also in place for SPH and EMS paramedics and may differ slightly.

20.0   Administrative Controls: Paperwork/Shared Surfaces

Maintain physical distancing – e.g. step back, then ask co-worker to place item on counter, they step back and you retrieve. These techniques while awkward at first, must become routine and will with practice.

- When possible, eliminate the handling of paper by using technology (scanning documents, e-signatures, and contactless delivery);

- Complete screening with delivery person prior to entrance into a facility;

- Have enough equipment available to avoid sharing (including pens);

- Clean all tools/equipment at the start and end of the day and shared tools before and after use;

- Wash your hands / use approved hand sanitizer before and after handling paperwork or using shared equipment;

- Discourage the use of common 'candy dishes', the use of common materials such as shared pens and office tools;

- Remove public pamphlet boards;

- Eliminate the use of water fountains that have a mouth dispenser; use automatic bottle refill station only;

- Discourage use of cash as much as possible.

21.0   Administrative Controls: Elevator Usage

Since physical distancing is not achievable in an elevator, limit elevator use to 1 person per car. If both occupants are wearing face coverings, a maximum of 2 riders is permitted. Everyone needs to do their part to maintain physical distancing!
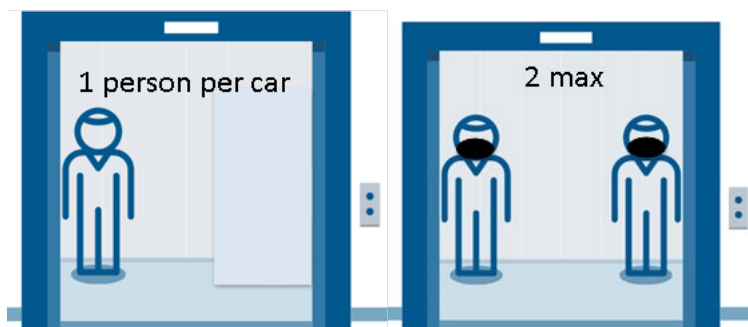
22.0   Administrative Controls: Role of JHSC

Joint Health and Safety Committees will continue to function to meet regulatory requirements within Section 9 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act.*

- Meetings will continue to occur as outlined in the Terms of Reference and every attempt will be made to hold the meeting limiting person to person contact (using virtual means, teleconferencing, etc.). If person to person contact is required, physical distancing must be maintained;

- Workplace inspections will continue to occur in workplaces that regularly exceed five workers;

- Changes to inspection schedules should be considered to limit worker interactions at other workplaces;

- JHSC Co-Chairs should be consulted with about any changes to functioning of their respective Committees;

- If time permits, JHSC should be consulted on COVID-19 related safety procedures or measures.

23.0   Administrative Controls: Psychological Safety in the Workplace

As leaders, we can't underestimate the impact this pandemic has had on the mental health of our staff – isolation, juggling demands, working both in and out of the home, life changes, etc. In addition to ensuring reasonable precautions are taken, workplace health and safety control measures also aim to ensure staff are comfortable and believe that they are safe, wherever they work.

- Ensure staff know where to find mental health support resources.

- FSEAP and other resources

24.0   Administrative Controls: Contact Tracing

- Contact tracing via an application will allow for greater control in the event of a suspected outbreak in the workplace or an employee who has tested positive. The health unit will require a record for contact tracing.

25.0   Administrative Controls: Training

- Employee and supervisor training will be offered through HRdownloads and other methods.

References

The County of Essex's COVID-19 Policy

The County of Essex's Corporate COVID-19 Procedure

The County of Essex's COVID-19 Exposure Protocol