

COVID-19 INFORMATION

COVID-19 EXPOSURE IN WORKPLACE COMMON AREAS

Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) incident monitoring shows an increase in COVID-19 exposure with the failure of controls in workplace common areas. Common areas include:

- lunchrooms/break rooms
- smoking areas
- hallways
- washrooms
- locker rooms
- parking lots
- time clocks
- elevators

This bulletin discusses the increased risk and some best practices to address this risk.

Key information

- Employers must assess a work site for hazards.
- When a hazard cannot be eliminated, it must be controlled.
- Supervisors are responsible for ensuring workers use all hazard controls and wear required personal protective equipment.
- An employer needs to have procedures for rapid response if or when workers show symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.

COVID-19 exposure in common areas can increase:

- with failure to follow rules, procedures and guidance related to COVID-19 protection,
- when a control is removed (e.g. removing a mask to eat, smoke or change clothes), and
- when cleaning and disinfecting protocols are inadequate.

Hazard assessment and control

Employers must ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers and others at or around their work site. This includes performing a hazard assessment to identify existing and potential hazards at a work site.

When performing a hazard assessment in a common area, consider things like:

- the size of the area and the number of people using the area
- how people move through the area
- high touch surfaces

When a hazard cannot be eliminated, it needs to be controlled. There is a hierarchy of controls that must be followed:

- first choice – engineering controls (e.g. plexiglass barriers)
- second choice – administrative controls (e.g. staggering break times)
- third choice – personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g. gloves, face shields, respirators)

Employers may need a combination of engineering and administrative controls and PPE to adequately protect workers.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring workers use all hazard controls and wear required PPE.

To learn more, read [Respiratory viruses and the workplace](#) and [Hazard assessment and control: A handbook for Alberta employers and workers](#).

Reduce the risk

Practices that may reduce this risk can include:

- Aid physical separation through barriers (plexiglass), signage, floor marking and traffic flow controls to limit the number of people in one space.
- Stagger worker arrival/departure times, lunchtimes, breaks and meetings to minimize

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the number of workers in one place at the same time (e.g. parking lots, locker rooms and near time clocks).

- Reduce worker movement and restrict common area access by assigning workers specific break areas (e.g. lunchrooms).
- Reduce or remove seats from lunchrooms and common areas.
- Remove shared items such as dishes and cutlery and difficult-to-clean items such as newspapers or magazines.
- If workers need certain common areas (such as a prayer room) at a particular time, consider designating temporary supplemental space to ensure physical distancing requirements can be maintained.
- Increase cleaning and disinfection frequency of high traffic areas, common areas, washrooms and shower facilities.
- Designate lockers and storage spaces for each worker.
- Post reminders in common areas about physical distancing, mask requirements and hand hygiene.

Rapid response plan

An employer needs to have procedures for rapid response if or when workers show symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.

Supervisors and workers need to know and follow the employer's rapid response plan.

For more information, see [Outbreak management plans for large production facilities](#).

Learn more about [isolation and quarantine requirements](#) if you have symptoms or are exposed to COVID-19.

Visit [Alberta Biz Connect](#) and the [OHS Resource Portal COVID-19 resources](#) for guidance and

supports on operating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public health orders change during an emergency such as COVID-19. Check public health orders at alberta.ca/COVID19 to make sure you know the current requirements.

For more information

Hazard assessment and control: A handbook for Alberta employers and workers (BP018)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

Outbreak management plans for large production facilities

alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-outbreak-management-plans-for-large-production-facilities.pdf

Respiratory viruses in the workplace (BP022)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bh022

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Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Report serious incidents, make immediate danger complaints, ask OHS questions

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton & surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

File a complaint online

ohsComplaintsPortal.labour.alberta.ca

Online incident reporting

Potentially serious, mine or mine site incidents

oir.labour.alberta.ca

OHS website

alberta.ca/ohs

Alberta Health Services

COVID-19 public health order violations

ephisahs.albertahealthservices.ca/create-case

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