

GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR COVID-19 AND OTHER RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS

Overview

Good public health practices can minimize transmission of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, influenza and common colds. These practices include: staying up to date with all routine immunizations, including COVID-19 and influenza vaccines, staying home when sick, proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, and maintaining adequate ventilation.

This document has been developed to support business/entity operators or event organizers in reducing the risk of transmission of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, among attendees (workers, patrons and the general public) by providing options to integrate good public health practices into normal operations. The advice included is built on lessons learned and strategies that have been successful throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Since each setting is different, it is up to individual operators and organizers to determine which strategies, or combinations of strategies, are most appropriate in their facility or for their activity.

Businesses and entities may also wish to promote COVID-19 and influenza immunization to staff, volunteers and attendees and other eligible persons as part of their public health strategy.

RISK MITIGATION

General Guidance

- COVID-19 and other respiratory infections are workplace hazards.
- Operators must conduct a workplace hazard assessment, and develop and implement safe workplace practices to protect against the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections.
 - Employers should refer to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Alberta Labour for requirements and guidance on hazard assessment and risk mitigation plans.
 - All employers are expected to maintain and reinforce safe workplace practices and to implement measures to control and mitigate workplace hazards.
- Operators are strongly encouraged to adopt best practices for infection prevention as part of their normal operating procedures. See the Infection Prevention Best Practices section below for more information on these measures:
 - Supporting staff to stay home when they are sick.
 - Albertans who test positive for COVID-19 or have respiratory symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, runny nose or sore throat, are recommended to stay home and follow the recommendations in the Isolation section below.
 - Encouraging frequent hand hygiene and making hand sanitizer available throughout the workplace.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encouraging attendees to follow respiratory etiquette. ○ Frequent cleaning and disinfecting. ● Albertans are not provincially required to wear face masks, but masks may be required by organizational policy in higher risk settings, such as in Alberta Health Services facilities and continuing care settings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Face masks can also be worn to provide additional protection for high-risk individuals, settings and activities and may be required in some community health settings such as pharmacies, physiotherapy clinics or family doctors' offices. ○ Alberta Health provides Guidance for Masks for the General Public, which recommends well-fitted masks. Medical masks or respirators provide better protection than 3-layer cloth or non-medical disposable masks. ● Operators are encouraged to increase staff awareness about the steps being taken to prevent the risk of transmission, and their role, such as posting signage around the workplace and providing basic training for staff.
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INFECTION PREVENTION BEST PRACTICES

Immunization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vaccines help prevent people from getting infected and protect them from getting severely sick if they do become infected. Where vaccines are available (e.g., for COVID-19, influenza), it is strongly recommended that all eligible individuals be immunized. ● Albertans are strongly encouraged to receive all doses of vaccine for which they are eligible. See COVID-19 vaccines and records, Influenza vaccines to check current eligibility requirements. ● Employers wishing to require that employees be vaccinated as a condition of employment are encouraged to seek legal guidance in implementing this policy.
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Albertans who have respiratory symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, runny nose or sore throat, and/or have tested positive for any respiratory illness (e.g. COVID-19, influenza) are recommended to stay home until: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Their symptoms have improved; AND ○ They feel well enough to resume normal activities; AND ○ They are free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication. ● Anyone who is feeling unwell, regardless of whether they have tested positive for a respiratory illness or not, should avoid visiting acute care or continuing care settings except when necessary (e.g. to receive emergency care) and if possible, avoid contact with anyone who may be at

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	<p>high risk of severe outcomes (e.g. elderly or immunocompromised individuals).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anyone who has respiratory symptoms is recommended to wear a mask for a total of 10 days from the onset of symptoms (even if the symptoms have resolved or improved) when in indoor settings with other individuals, especially when in contact with anyone who may be at high risk of severe outcomes (e.g. elderly or immunocompromised individuals). • Hospitalized patients or residents in congregate care facilities/living sites should follow isolation recommendations as directed by AHS Infection Prevention and Control and/or the facility. Operators are encouraged to support workers or volunteers to stay home while sick. Operators may consider providing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flexible work-at-home arrangements; ○ Paid or unpaid leave, regardless of length of service, to be used when staff are sick; ○ Clarity around company policy defining when ill staff are expected to stay at home.
Spacing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respiratory infections tend to spread rapidly in enclosed spaces with a large number of people; increasing space between people and individuals from different households reduces the risk of transmission. • Operators may consider options to increase spacing between workers, patrons and members of the public, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arranging seating/tables/countertops/work stations/beds to allow spacing between attendees. ○ Allowing space between seating or work spaces; consider capacity limit for the venue. ○ Reducing the number of attendees in a location at one time through capacity limits or staggered scheduling (e.g., use reservations and staggered entry times to avoid people lingering or waiting in lines). ○ Implementing practices and/or encouraging staff and attendees to respect an individual's need for personal space. ○ Providing space to reduce crowding in general.
Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting frequent and proper hand hygiene for all attendees can help reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading through contact with surfaces and with other people. Operators can encourage hand hygiene by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. ○ Posting hand washing signs. • Operators are encouraged to promote respiratory etiquette (e.g., coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow, promptly disposing of used tissues in a lined garbage bin).

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Cleaning and Disinfecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operators are encouraged to develop and implement procedures for cleaning and disinfecting of facilities including high traffic areas, common areas, public washrooms and showering facilities.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Items that are loaned, rented, or made freely available for use by multiple individuals, such as shopping carts and baskets, wheelchairs, and pushcarts, should be regularly cleaned and disinfected.• Operators are encouraged to use cleaning and disinfection products according to the directions on the label.
ADDITIONAL MEASURES	
Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operators are not required to provide regular testing for COVID-19 or other respiratory infections.• Free rapid test kits are available to all Albertans through pharmacies across the province.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ They perform best when used for people who have symptoms, to determine if they have COVID-19.○ It is no longer recommended to use a rapid antigen test on someone who does not have any symptoms of respiratory illness.
Safer Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offering virtual or outdoor options for meetings, gatherings, work and service delivery reduces opportunities for spread of infection, since there are fewer interactions and less build up of respiratory particles compared to indoor, in-person settings.• Examples of alternative operational practices include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ curb-side pick up or contactless delivery;○ drive-in or drive-through services;○ work-from-home arrangements;○ online and videoconferencing or teleconferencing options to staff.• Individuals should be supported in assessing their own risk of acquiring COVID-19 or other respiratory infections, and, wherever possible, in taking precautions appropriate to their situation.
Ventilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proper ventilation is an effective measure to reduce the concentration of airborne contaminants, including airborne disease, in indoor locations. It does this by increasing the rate of air change, reducing recirculation of air and increasing the use of outdoor air.• Operators are encouraged to ensure ventilation systems are well maintained and functioning optimally.• The variety and complexity of HVAC systems in large buildings requires professional interpretation of technical guidelines and codes.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portable air purifiers should not be seen as a replacement for adequate ventilation, but may be considered as an additional protection in situations where enhancing natural or mechanical ventilation is not possible. • If portable air purifiers are used, the air purifier should be equipped with a high-efficiency particle air (HEPA) filter, certified by a recognized body such as the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM), and be large enough for the size of the room or area where it will be used.
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operators are encouraged to examine the need for specific types of PPE as part of their workplace safety and hazard assessment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operators can use OHS's Respiratory Protective Equipment: An Employer's Guide to determine if PPE is required for certain activities in their facilities. • Operators should consider having a plan in place to minimize the risk of transmission if a staff member or client starts to exhibit symptoms of a respiratory disease at the workplace. This could include encouraging and supporting the staff member to isolate, or providing the staff member with a medical mask to use while they are around others in the workplace.
Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical barriers remain an effective means of reducing transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections in some circumstances. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Barriers are effective for separating individuals who are in close proximity (e.g., between booths at a restaurant, or a cashier and shopper at the point of purchase). • To be effective, barriers should be impermeable, and wide/tall enough to fully separate the individuals. • The impact of barriers on ventilation and air flow should be considered prior to installation.

This document and the recommendations within it is subject to change and will be updated as needed.

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