

OHS eNews – Special edition Returning to the workplace

Alberta



COVID-19 as a workplace hazard

As Alberta enters Stage 3 of reopening and COVID-19 restrictions are reduced, people are returning to the workplace. With changing pandemic-specific conditions, the hazard assessment must be reviewed and updated.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation requires employers to protect the health and safety of workers at the work site and others at or around the work site. This includes performing a hazard assessment to identify existing and potential workplace hazards. The hazard assessment must include the potential for all types of hazards, including those related to the COVID-19 virus. Employers must involve affected workers when doing a hazard assessment.

Factors to consider when assessing the potential hazards from COVID-19 include:

- any orders of the Chief Medical Officer of Health that are applicable to the workplace
- active cases or symptomatic workers at your work site
- active cases in the region
- number of vaccinated workers, if available
- presence of persons with health vulnerabilities
- type and duration of interactions with other workers or the public
- physical distancing at the workplace
- type of work or activities performed
- how other hazards and controls at the work site might affect COVID-19 controls

Controlling the COVID-19 hazard

Based on the employer's hazard assessment and consideration of the potential for COVID-19 at the work site, hazards that cannot be eliminated must be controlled using the hierarchy of controls.

First choice: engineering controls. These control a hazard at the source. Depending on the workplace and processes, examples might include ventilation systems or physical barriers, such as plexiglass. Vaccinations are also considered to be an engineering control.

Second choice: administrative controls. These change the way people work. Examples include worker training or hand hygiene, physical distancing, alternate work arrangements or regular workplace cleaning policies.

Third choice: personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE controls the hazard at the worker. PPE examples include gloves, eye protection, facemasks or respirators.

If the hazard cannot be controlled by a single control method, the employer must use a combination of engineering, administrative and personal protective equipment to ensure worker protection.

Vaccination

Vaccination is an effective control to protect against the COVID-19 virus. The roll out of vaccines provides workers and all Albertans over age 12 an opportunity to be immunized. Current evidence indicates vaccines are effective in preventing illness due to a COVID-19 infection.

Employers should consider seeking legal advice on issues and laws relating to human rights, labour and employment, privacy, health information and occupational health and safety before asking for proof of vaccination or implementing mandatory vaccine requirements.



Respiratory protective equipment: Ministerial Order 2020-32 expires soon

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, [Ministerial Order 2020-32](#) was established to temporarily allow the use of respirators meeting international standards as alternatives to N95 respirators. This order will expire on August 14, 2021.

See Part 18 of the OHS Code to learn about requirements for respiratory protective equipment use on work sites.

For more information:

[Employer's toolkit for vaccination](#)

[Hazard assessment and control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers](#)

[Occupational health and safety guidance for workers](#)

[Psychological hazards: returning to the workplace](#)

[Public health measures in effect](#)

[Respiratory viruses and the workplace](#)

[Respiratory protective equipment: an employer's guide](#)

[Respiratory protective equipment: code of practice development](#)

[Worker deconditioning following an absence from the workplace](#)

Quick links

[Alberta OHS legislation](#)

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[Approved training](#)

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780-415-8690 (Edmonton)

TTY: 1-800-232-7215

TTY: 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

[Report a serious incident](#)

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Potentially serious, mine or mine site incidents

[Notify OHS of health and safety concerns online](#)

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