



Introduction

This tip sheet is for employers and employees who work in correctional facilities. It provides an overview of recommended controls to help reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace. Additional controls will be required depending on the specific workplace and tasks performed by employees.

For general COVID-19 prevention practices, both employers and employees can refer to the CCOHS resource "[Protect Yourself and Others from COVID-19](#)".

Consider the Risks

- The risk of contracting COVID-19 increases in situations where people are in closed spaces (with poor ventilation) and crowded places when with people from outside their immediate household. Risk is higher in settings where these factors overlap and/or involve activities such as close-range conversations, singing, shouting or heavy breathing (e.g., during exertion).
- As an employee, potential sources of exposure include:
 - having close contact with a person who has COVID-19 and
 - touching surfaces or items that have been touched or handled by a person with COVID-19, and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Each workplace is unique. Employers need to assess the risks of COVID-19 transmission for their specific workplace and the activities conducted by their employees (such as interactions with inmates and co-workers).
- The employer must then implement appropriate hazard controls using the [hierarchy of controls](#) (i.e., elimination, substitution, engineering controls, administrative policies, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)). Use multiple [personal preventive practices](#) in a layered approach.
- Consider implementing a written workplace safety plan that identifies potential exposures to COVID-19 and the controls used to protect employees. The safety plan should be specific to the workplace and include all roles (e.g., correctional officers, correctional healthcare professionals, social workers, janitors, food service employees, administrative staff, visitors, and inmates).
- Employers should consider the following:
 - How will employees be screened? It is recommended that employees are screened before each work shift.
 - Where do employees interact with co-workers, inmates, and visitors? Controls (e.g., physical distancing, wearing masks) need to be implemented when employees are in a shared space with people outside their immediate household.
 - How close are the physical interactions? The risk of transmission increases with close and frequent contact.
 - How long are the interactions? Evidence indicates that the person-to-person spread is more likely with prolonged contact.
 - How will shared surfaces be cleaned and disinfected? Ensure that all supplies are available, and that the disinfectant used has a drug identification number (DIN) from Health Canada.
 - What tasks are conducted at the workplace? Assess the risk of COVID-19 exposure for activities conducted by all job tasks or roles.

Vaccine



- Encourage all employees and inmates to get the vaccine once available in your jurisdiction.
- For additional information on the vaccine please refer to the Government of Canada website “[What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine for Canada](#)”.

Communication and Training

- Provide information and instruction to employees about the hazards of COVID-19 and what they need to do to protect themselves and others. Topics should include:
 - what COVID-19 is and the common symptoms,
 - how the virus spreads
 - screening and what to do if employees feel sick or may have been exposed,
 - how layering multiple control measures helps to prevent the spread
 - specific personal preventive practices that can be used to protect employees,
 - proper hand hygiene, as well as sneeze and cough etiquette,
 - how to properly wear, handle, and care for personal protective equipment
 - safe use of cleaning and disinfection chemicals,
 - how to stay informed about COVID-19 ([using reputable sources](#)).
- Communication and training should be easy to understand, and in the preferred language(s) spoken or read by the employees if possible.
- Provide mental health support resources for all employees.
- Put up posters or other signs in the workplace regarding COVID-19 control measures (e.g., hand hygiene, use of masks, proper coughing/sneezing etiquette, physical distancing) where they will clearly be visible.
- Encourage employees to report any concerns about COVID-19 to their supervisor or employer. Employees can also report concerns to their health and safety committee or representative, or union if present.
- Provide regular communications so that employees are informed of updates and have an opportunity to discuss their questions and concerns.
- Provide regular updates to inmates regarding COVID-19 and the precautions being taken to prevent transmission. Ask inmates to notify staff right away if they experience any symptoms or feel sick.

Screening

- Consider asking screening questions to employees, before each work shift, using a [checklist](#) from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) or your local public health authority.
- Some jurisdictions require active screening of employees everyday before they come into work. Active screening steps may involve a self-assessment (e.g., using a web-based tool, having a person complete a questionnaire, or having a designated person asking direct questions). Consider the size of your workforce, the number of worksites, shifts, and activities when choosing your screening method.
- Instruct employees who have [COVID-19 symptoms](#) to stay home, even if symptoms are mild. If they are at work and develop symptoms, they need to wear a mask (preferably a respirator or medical mask, if not available a well-constructed and well fitting non-medical mask) and return home immediately (preferably not by public transit)
- The most common symptoms are:
 - New or worsening cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Temperature equal to or over 38°C
 - Feeling feverish
 - Chills



- Fatigue or weakness
- Muscle or body aches
- New loss of smell or taste
- Headache
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting)
- Feeling very unwell
- Skin changes or rashes (young children)
- Symptoms can vary from person to person and within different age groups.
- Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to COVID-19. Some people have mild or no symptoms.
- Older adults, people of any age with chronic medical conditions or who are immunocompromised, and those living with obesity are at risk for more severe disease and outcomes from COVID-19.
- Develop procedures for contacting local public health authorities for further advice in the event of a positive COVID-19 case. If the case is work-related, additional notifications may be required (e.g., the jurisdictional [health and safety regulator](#) and [worker compensation board](#)).
- Develop screening policies for newly admitted inmates to prevent the introduction of COVID-19 in the correctional facility. Consider:
 - Screening all inmates at intake.
 - Housing newly admitted inmates in a separate area from the general population for 14 days and testing them for COVID-19 with their consent, before joining the general population.
 - Ensure there are procedures in place for symptomatic individuals and known close contacts of those who test positive for COVID-19. They should be kept medically isolated from others (e.g., single cell accommodation or alternative accommodation based on consultation with an infection control specialist).
 - Ask any inmate who is displaying symptoms to wear a mask (preferably a respirator or medical mask, if not available a well-constructed and well fitting non-medical mask)
 - Make COVID-19 testing available to inmates that are displaying symptoms.
- Make sure personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn by staff that interact with people suspected of having COVID-19 (see PPE section for further details).

Rapid Testing

- Rapid testing can be used as part of your active screening process. While they are not as sensitive as laboratory (polymerase chain reaction - PCR) tests, rapid tests can be useful in detecting people infected with COVID-19, including those who are asymptomatic.
- Employers should determine how rapid testing can be used in their facility for consenting individuals. For example, consider using rapid testing for testing staff and inmates at sites experiencing an outbreak.
- For further information, please refer to Government of Canada website "[Interim guidance on the use of rapid antigen detection tests for the identification of SARS-CoV-2 infection](#)" and the CCOHS resource "[Rapid Testing for COVID-19](#)".

Reducing Potential Exposures

- Evaluate if any employees can perform their job from home (e.g., administrative staff).
- Provide ergonomic support and resources for employees setting up home offices.
- Eliminate non-essential work travel for all employees.
- Discourage unnecessary physical contact such as handshakes.
- Stagger meetings and breaks to minimize the number of employees in one place at the same time.



- Limit or reschedule non-essential site visits by contractors or vendors.
- Avoid sharing equipment, electronics, tools, and supplies where possible. Disinfect between users if sharing cannot be avoided.
- Reduce the amount of paper documentation being exchanged between employees. Consider using digital or electronic methods to exchange documents. If this can't be avoided, wash or sanitize hands after exchanging documents.
- Have adequate infection control and medical supplies available.
- Make sure there is dedicated space available for medical isolation and care of COVID-19 patients (this may involve repurposing of prison areas).
- Restrict non-essential transfers of people between facilities and systems, if possible.
- Postpone non-critical infrastructure work.
- Try to reduce overcrowding (e.g., diverting new intakes to other facilities with available capacity if possible).
- Organize staff assignments so that the same staff are assigned to the same area of the facility over time to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission through staff movements.

Physical Distancing

- Keep the greatest physical distance possible (at least 2 metres) from people outside your immediate household, including inmates and co-workers (where possible).
- Maintain physical distancing during breaks and lunch hour.
- When feasible and consistent with security procedures, encourage staff to maintain physical distancing from all other individuals while interviewing, escorting, or interacting in other ways with inmates. Identify situations where closer contact is necessary. Create rules for any work that requires employees to work within two metres of another person and include precautions such as the use of personal protective equipment.
- Provide signs, floor markings, and other visual cues in appropriate areas (e.g., in communal spaces such as dining halls, exercise areas and staff rooms) to encourage physical distancing.
- Control foot traffic patterns to reduce gathering at specific areas, and designate travel paths so persons do not have to pass each other closely (e.g., one set of stairs for up, another for down).
- Avoid in-person meetings where possible. Use remote communications methods instead (e.g., teleconferencing, videoconferencing). When in-person meetings are unavoidable, use a large well-ventilated space, stay the greatest physical distance (at least 2 meters) apart from others, and wear masks.
- Consider splitting out-of-cell time, which could be divided by wing/unit to reduce the number of staff/inmates in open or shared spaces.
- House inmates in single person cells where possible. If inmates are sharing a cell, consider placing beds at least 6 feet apart and have people sleep head-to-foot to increase the distance between their faces. Consider clear plastic curtains between beds, if allowed for safety and security reasons.
- Rearrange seating in dining halls so that there is more space between individuals (e.g., remove every other chair and use only one side of the table).
- Consider staggering the start time for staff to prevent congregating outside the facility before entry. Signage or floor marking should be used to encourage physical distancing.

Physical Barriers

- Install transparent barriers where physical distancing is not feasible (e.g., visitor check-in areas, table dividers in cafeterias etc.).
- The physical barrier should be robustly constructed and made from a non-porous material such as plexiglass than can be easily cleaned and disinfected.



Ventilation

- Verify that the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system(s) for the facility is working properly.
- Ensure preventative maintenance for the HVAC system(s) is conducted according to manufacturer's instructions (e.g., regular filter changes and inspection of critical components).
- If possible, consult a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) professional to determine whether your HVAC system:
 - can be adjusted to increase air exchange rates
 - is using filters of the highest Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) rating compatible with the system.
- For additional information on indoor ventilation, please refer to:
 - [COVID-19: Guidance on indoor ventilation during the pandemic](#), Government of Canada
 - [Indoor Ventilation: Guidance During The COVID-19 Pandemic](#), CCOHS
- If travelling in vehicles with other people, increase the amount of fresh outside air entering the vehicle by opening the windows (weather permitting) and setting the ventilation to outside air. Avoid using the recirculated air option.

Personal Hygiene

- Encourage frequent and proper hand washing with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Place hand sanitizer dispensers at entrances to correctional facilities and in high traffic areas. Inspect regularly and refill where required.
- Wash hands at the start of shift, before eating or drinking, after touching shared items (e.g., tools, medical devices), after touching common surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, handles), after touching another person, after touching dirty linens or clothes, after using the washroom, and at the end of the shift.
- Correctional health care professionals should follow the [World Health Organization's](#) "My five moments for hand hygiene" approach to cleaning their hands:
 - before touching a patient
 - before any clean or aseptic procedure is performed
 - after exposure to body fluid
 - after touching a patient
 - after touching a patient's surrounding
- Discourage individuals from touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Remind employees not to touch the outer surface of their mask while wearing or handling it as it may be contaminated.
- Promote good respiratory hygiene. Provide disposable tissues and remind individuals to cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm or a tissue and to dispose of tissues immediately, followed up with hand washing or use of hand sanitizer.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Viruses can remain on objects for a few hours to days depending on the type of surface and environmental conditions.
- To promote consistent disinfecting practices, create and provide a routine cleaning and disinfecting [procedure](#), schedule and checklist.
- Clean and disinfect all high contact surfaces. For example:
 - Tools and equipment if shared by employees (e.g., medical devices, keys, tablets, flashlights, radios,



etc.)

- Office doorknobs, and workstations (e.g., computer keyboard, mouse, phone)
- Staff room surfaces (e.g., furniture, tables, sinks, faucets, light switches, cabinets, kettle, coffee maker, refrigerator, microwave)
- Washroom surfaces (e.g., door handles, counters, faucets, soap dispensers)
- Kitchen and food preparation areas (e.g., counter tops, tables, cabinets, fridge handles, etc.)
- Dining halls (e.g., tables, chairs)
- Fitness areas (e.g., surface areas on workout equipment)
- Visitor areas (e.g., tables, chairs, washrooms, plexiglass barriers, speaking devices, etc.).
- Materials used for activities (e.g. electronic tablets, remotes, or other devices)
- Use household or commercial disinfectants to destroy or inactivate viruses and bacteria. The disinfectant used should have a drug identification number (DIN), meaning that it has been [approved for use in Canada](#).
- Employees should be trained on the safe use of cleaning and disinfecting products. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using, handling, or storing the product. Review the product's label, and (if applicable) safety data sheet to determine what precautions to follow.
- Provide employees with adequate supplies and access to any required personal protective equipment.
- Entry and exit doors to the yard area should be wiped down once a group passes through.
- Vehicles used to transfer inmates should be cleaned and disinfected after use (e.g., door handles, windows, seats, seatbelts, steering wheel, etc.)
- If COVID-19 is confirmed or suspected, clean and disinfect the space where the individual was located. Wear the appropriate PPE required by your employer. This equipment may include gloves, gown/coveralls and eye protection. Clean and disinfect any surfaces (e.g., cells, bathrooms, and common areas) or items that the person has contacted. If practical, wait as long as possible before beginning to clean and disinfect to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets.
- For the infected person's linens and clothing (if applicable), make sure to:
 - Wear the appropriate PPE (e.g., gloves, gown, coveralls)
 - Place contaminated laundry into a laundry bag or basket with a plastic liner and do not shake.
 - Launder items according to the manufacturer's instructions. Machine wash using the warmest appropriate water setting (preferably hot water), use laundry detergent, and dry thoroughly.
- Any non-disposable dishes/utensils/cups should be handled with gloves and washed with hot water or cleaned in a dishwasher.

Mask Wearing

- A well-fitting and well-constructed mask should be worn whenever people are in a shared space (indoors or outdoors) with others from outside of their immediate household.
- Develop policies regarding the use of masks at the facility. Consider all roles (unless a medical exemption exists), for example having:
 - Staff always wear the mask (medical or non-medical) provided by their employer except when eating or drinking.
 - Visitors wear masks at all times when in the facility.
 - Inmates wear masks when outside their cell or room (except when eating or drinking).
- Ensure the requirements for mask use set by your local public health authority are followed.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Employers should conduct a hazard assessment and make sure that employees have the correct PPE for their protection. Guidance is available from:



- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) (for health care professionals)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(USA\) for management of coronavirus in correctional and detention facilities](#) (also includes alternatives when there is a shortage of PPE)
- Employees are required to wear the PPE required by their employer. PPE may include appropriate disposable examination gloves (e.g., nitrile), eye protection (face shield or goggles), gown, and medical mask or N95 (or higher protection) respirator depending on the tasks being conducted.
- Ensure that workers are trained on the proper use of PPE including donning and doffing procedures.
- Before issuing a tight-fitting respirator (e.g., N95) to a worker, ensure that they are fit tested. Fit testing verifies that there is an effective seal between the respirator and the worker's face.
- Training on the care, use and storage of respirators should include:
 - Limitations of the respirator
 - Inspection and maintenance of the respirator
 - Proper fitting of the respirator
 - Cleaning and disinfecting the respirator (if applicable)
 - Performing seal checks, immediately after donning a respirator
- Remind employees that having facial hair will interfere with the proper functioning of a respirator. Facial hair can cause respirators to leak around the face seal allowing infectious particles to bypass the filter.
- Set up a safe area directly outside of spaces requiring PPE. Areas should be stocked with decontamination supplies (e.g., a dedicated garbage disposal bin for used PPE, a hand washing station or hand sanitizer dispenser, cleaning and disinfecting supplies for re-useable PPE, and a poster reminding employees how to properly don and doff their PPE).
- Make sure that any inmates on work programs also have access to PPE (if applicable depending on the tasks conducted).

Visitors

- Monitor conditions in the facility. Restrict access to visitors if conditions are not safe (e.g., during an outbreak).
- Encourage visitors to call ahead to confirm that the facility is open to visitors, if they plan on visiting inmates.
- Update your visitor policy to include COVID-19 precautions.
- Use all available means (e.g., website, e-mails, posters, etc.) to remind visitors about the preventive measures being taken to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Make sure all visitors undergo a screening before entering a facility, which includes a screening for COVID-19 symptoms, questions about travel outside of Canada or contact with someone who may be sick (as discussed in the Screening section above). Do not allow visitors who present with symptoms or fail the screening process to proceed with the scheduled visit.
- Make sure visitors wash their hands when entering the facility, wear a mask and maintain physical distancing staying the greatest distance away possible (at least 2 metres) from others.

Contingency Plans

- Review and adjust contingency plans to address issues related to COVID-19 such as: what to do if there is a staff shortage, and what to do in the event of an outbreak (including how communication will be coordinated with stakeholders such as the local public health authority).

Evaluate Controls

- Regularly review the adequacy of the controls implemented and make improvements as necessary.
- Determine if there are any new hazards created by any of the changes implemented at the workplace. For

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example, if staff are issued N95 respirators have they been fit tested? Review and adjust programs as necessary.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a [Crisis Centre in your area](#).



It is important that mental health resources and support are provided to all workers, including access to an employee assistance program, if available.

For further information on COVID-19, refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.

Disclaimer: As public and occupational health and safety information is changing rapidly, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.