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Introduction

This document provides information about the use of physical barriers as a hazard control in the workplace.

In all cases, guidance from [local public health authorities](#) and your jurisdictional [occupational health and safety regulator](#) should be followed.

For general COVID-19 prevention practices, refer to these CCOHS documents:

- [COVID-19 Health and Safety Resources](#)
- [Protect Yourself and Others from COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Health and Safety Planning for Employers](#)
- [COVID-19 Prevention for Workers](#)
- [COVID-19 FAQ](#)

Consider the Risks

The risk of [COVID-19 transmission](#) is increased when:

- Person-to-person interactions are longer and more frequent, especially when less than 2 metres apart.
- Attending crowded or poorly ventilated places.
- Taking part in activities that generate respiratory particles (e.g., when speaking, coughing, singing, shouting, etc.).
- People have inadequate hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, or access to proper hygiene facilities.
- Frequently touching contaminated high-touch surfaces, and shared objects.
- There is a high number of local community COVID-19 cases (or an outbreak).

Workers may be exposed to a combination of these risks. Consider all possible COVID-19 exposure scenarios in your setting before installing barriers. Each workplace is unique. It is important for employers to assess the risks of COVID-19 spread in their specific workplace and implement appropriate control measures.

Control Measures

To provide the highest level of protection to workers, use multiple [public health measures](#) and [workplace controls](#) in a [layered approach](#). No single measure is completely effective alone. Be careful not to create new workplace hazards or negatively impact existing control measures. Review and adjust measures as necessary in consultation with the workplace health and safety committee or representative.

Meet your legal occupational health and safety obligations by doing everything reasonably possible in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of your workers.



Make sure workers follow the workplace policies and control measures that have been implemented.

Regularly review the effectiveness of the physical barriers and make improvements as necessary.

Use

Physical barriers:

- Separate people and help prevent the spread of respiratory particles from person-to-person (mostly while speaking).
- May be used as a hazard control when it is not possible to maintain physical distancing or when there is frequent interaction or communication with others (e.g., customers).
- Are more effective when interactions are short.
- May be used in some locations in the workplace such as (but not limited to):
 - Retail point of sale
 - Grocery or dining checkout
 - Ticket sale counters
 - Reception or customer service desks
 - Bank teller counters
 - Pharmacy pick up or drop off
 - Transportation services (taxis, car services, buses, etc.)
- Should always be used in conjunction with other COVID-19 control measures (e.g., reduced occupancy, adequate ventilation, use of masks, etc.).

Materials

- Barriers are often made from clear impermeable materials such as:
 - Plexiglass (acrylic)
 - Polycarbonate
 - Vinyl (curtains)
 - Glass (for permanent installations)
- Avoid increasing workplace hazards by installing barriers that are light, flexible, and shatterproof.
- Physical barriers may include curtains, counter-mounted or freestanding barriers and dividers.
- Barriers must be constructed from materials that are able to block large respiratory particles. Materials such as plants, porous fabrics, paper, etc. do not make effective barriers.
- When selecting a material type for your physical barrier, consider the following properties:
 - Durability and impermeability
 - Scratch and impact resistance
 - Ease of cleaning and disinfecting
 - Transparency when there is a need to see through the barrier
 - Local fire code and building code requirements (e.g., use of flame-retardant and non-combustible materials)

Dimensions

- Determine if the barrier will be used by people who are sitting or standing.
- The height of the barrier should consider the tallest user and should cover the breathing zones of both people on either side of the barrier.

Physical Barriers



- Barriers should extend 30 cm (12 inches) above the tallest person's nose and 30 cm below the shortest person's nose.
- The width of barrier should be at least 60 cm (24 inches), and people should be advised to stay centered on either side of the barrier. A wider barrier may provide better protection and prevent bypassing the barrier.
- Pass-throughs or openings for objects (e.g., documents, money, payment machines, etc.) should be as small as possible and not located in the breathing zone of either person.

Installation

- Consult your facilities manager or building owner and a ventilation specialist before installing barriers. The barriers should be setting-specific and designed to comply with applicable building and fire codes.
- Determine if any municipal construction permits are required before installation.
- Ensure that physical barriers are designed to work with the ventilation or fire protection systems in the space. When installed improperly, especially near ventilation inputs and exhausts, barriers can interfere with air movement, potentially reducing ventilation effectiveness. Consider consulting a ventilation specialist to ensure that barriers do not interfere with the airflow and ventilation of the space.
- Ensure that installation meets accessibility requirements.
- Verify that the barrier is securely installed and cannot tip or fall.
- Physical barriers should never prevent escape in an emergency.
- Verify that travel distance to exits is not increased and that exit paths are not restricted.
- Barriers mounted in vehicles must not interfere with the driver's ability to see.
- After installation, encourage employees to report any concerns with physical barriers to their supervisor or employer. Employees can also report concerns to their health and safety committee or representative.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Viruses can remain on objects for a few hours to days depending on the type of surface and environmental conditions.
- Clean and disinfect both sides of the barrier regularly.
- The frequency of cleaning and disinfecting will depend on the amount of time the barriers are used. For example, barriers used in front of cashiers or bank tellers may become contaminated quickly at busy times.
- Use disinfectants that destroy or inactivate the virus but do not damage the barrier. 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 the 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 (e.g., use of personal protective equipment).
- For additional information, refer to the CCOHS resource [Cleaning and Disinfecting](#).

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.

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

Physical Barriers



Disclaimer: As public and occupational health and safety information may continue to change, 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.