

Occupations and Workplaces

Personal Support Worker

On this page

[What does a personal support worker do?](#)

[What are some preventive measures for personal support workers?](#)

[What are some health and safety issues for personal support workers?](#)

[What are some good general safe work practices?](#)

What does a personal support worker do?

A personal support worker (PSW) is a healthcare professional who supports the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of clients who require personal assistance with activities of daily living. PSWs can work in various environments, such as:

- Community and home care
- Long-term care
- Retirement homes
- Hospitals
- Group homes and supportive housing
- Adult day programs and mental health programs

The duties of a PSW can vary depending on the client's specific needs, but their responsibilities typically include:

- Helping with personal care
- Planning and preparing meals according to specific dietary requirements
- Assisting with client mobility and transfers
- Monitoring and reminding clients to take medication at appropriate times
- Providing client support for emotions and companionship
- Simple home maintenance and housekeeping
- Escorting clients to appointments and social outings

What are some health and safety issues for personal support workers?

There are several potential health and safety hazards that personal support workers can encounter across their various working environments. Some of the hazards include:

- Biological hazards can cause illnesses or diseases. These hazards include:
 - bodily secretions (e.g., blood, urine, saliva, and feces)
 - exposure to [infectious diseases](#) (e.g., COVID-19) when working in close contact with infected individuals or in areas where infected individuals live or visit
 - exposure to [needles or other sharps](#) following client use or disposal of injectable medications
 - pests (e.g., mice)
 - mould due to [indoor air quality](#) concerns
- Allergens (e.g., latex, chemical products, animal fur, etc.)
- Exposure to [chemicals](#) when using cleaning products (e.g., [bleach](#))
- [Compressed gases](#)
- Manual work that involves force, repetition, awkward postures and prolonged activities that can lead to [musculoskeletal disorders](#)
- [Workplace violence](#), such as:
 - physical aggression (i.e., grabbing, hitting, biting, throwing objects)
 - verbal abuse (i.e., threats of violence)
- Distressing events such as the loss of a client, leading to psychological stress
- [Working alone with patients](#) and [working alone](#) without much professional connection to other colleagues and supervisors
- Exposure to [sharp objects](#) (e.g., knives) when preparing client meals
- Damage to the skin is a possible consequence of frequent hand washing and skin conditions such as dermatitis may occur
- [Slip, trip or fall hazards](#)
- [Driving](#) hazards leading to motor vehicle incidents during the commute to or between clients
- [Fatigue](#) and other health concerns due to a demanding workload, [shift work](#) or [long hours of work](#)

What are some preventive measures for personal support workers?

Some preventive measures include:

- Proper [hand hygiene](#) before and after all care is essential to reduce infections and viruses. Be sure to use hand moisturizers and other precautions to prevent your skin from drying out and developing [dermatitis](#)
- Implement and follow a [safe patient handling program](#) – Use safe body mechanics and assistive devices
- Institute a "no-lift" policy, where possible
- Review your employer's [violence and harassment program](#). If such a program is not present, encourage the employer to develop one (required in many jurisdictions)
- Know emergency contact numbers and keep them immediately available
- Conduct a [psychological health and safety assessment](#) to identify the [psychosocial hazards](#) to help implement proactive control measures where possible
- Consider offering debriefing or counselling through an [employee assistance program](#) after a critical event to help reduce the psychological impact on staff members
- If work involves providing support for clients receiving oxygen therapy, staff should be given appropriate training on working with compressed gases
- If [working alone](#), use a cellular phone or have another way to stay in regular contact with the workplace
- Follow a recommended shift work pattern and be aware of the hazards associated with it
- Practice safe driving by staying informed of road rules, exercising extra caution during the winter season, and following your organization's established driving policies and procedures
- Always use the correct [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) or other barriers for the task. In some cases, latex gloves will not be appropriate (e.g., cleaning with certain chemicals)
- Be aware that developing a [latex allergy](#) is possible
- Wear appropriate [footwear](#) (for walking and standing, as well as protection from slipping hazards and dropped objects)

What are some good general safe work practices?

A personal support worker should know:

- [Good hygiene practices](#)
 - Proper selection, use, maintenance and storage of PPE, where appropriate
 - Current [WHMIS education](#), workplace chemicals specific training and how to use the information on [safety data sheets \(SDS\)](#)
 - [Manual material handling](#) (lifting) techniques
 - Information about shift work
 - Information about [fatigue](#)
 - Workplace violence and harassment, and how to report disrespectful, threatening, abusive, or violent behaviour
 - Good [housekeeping](#) procedures
 - What to do when working alone (general information) and working alone with patients
 - How to select proper footwear and [respiratory protection](#)
-

Fact sheet first published: 2026-05-05

Fact sheet last revised: 2026-05-05

Disclaimer

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.