



Preventing exposure to COVID-19

Food Management and Services

July 23, 2020

Introduction:

As the global pandemic of COVID-19 persists, CUPE wants to ensure that employers and members continue to implement leading practices to prevent workplace exposure to the virus which causes COVID-19.

The guidance in this document is specific to addressing the hazard related to COVID-19. It is intended to assist CUPE health and safety activists in their efforts to ensure that adequate protections are in place for members. In the case of those workplaces that have suspended operations, the guidance is intended to assist in implementing effective controls prior to the resumption of normal operations.

The information linked below helps highlight some of hazards that increase the likelihood of exposure. Find CUPE's COVID-19 resources here:

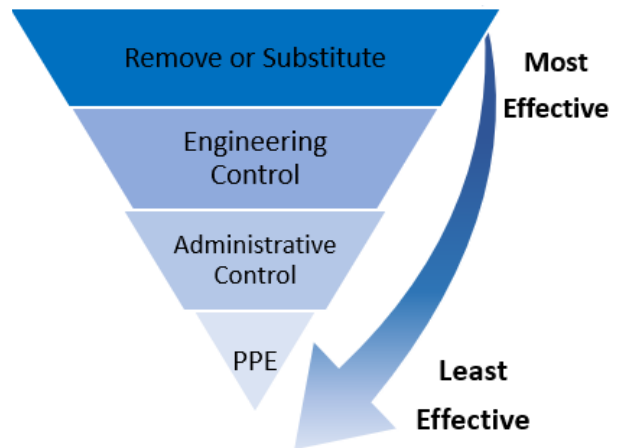
- [General Occupational Guidelines for COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Fact Sheet](#)
- [COVID-19 and the Right to Refuse Unsafe Work](#)
- [COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting](#)
- [COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment](#)
- [COVID-19 and the Use of Masks and Respirators](#)
- [COVID-19 Masks and Face Coverings](#)
- [Good Hygiene Practices and the Respiratory \(Cough\) Etiquette](#)

It remains vital that employers continue to work with their (joint) health and safety committee about the best way to control sector-specific hazards during this pandemic.

This document provides specific guidance to CUPE members working in food preparation and services. General guidance can be found [HERE](#) and should be reviewed in conjunction with this document and the specific sector documents which apply to your workplace which can be found [HERE](#).

Hierarchy of controls

Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) is concerned with identifying workplace hazards and implementing control measures that reduce the risk of hazards leading to illness or injury. In the field of OH&S there is a concept called the “hierarchy of controls”. This is the broad category of controls that can be used to address hazards found in the workplace. They range from the strongest controls (eliminating the hazard) to the weakest controls (personal protective equipment PPE).



Personal protective equipment (PPE) is not the most effective hazard control. It is a last resort when the hazard cannot be adequately addressed using more effective controls “up” the hierarchy. Due to pervasive media coverage of PPE shortages across the world, and due to PPE’s vital role as one of many control measures that workplaces utilize, there is a common misconception that PPE is the best (or only) hazard control that can protect workers from COVID-19. This is a potentially dangerous assumption. It limits the discussion to, and consideration for, stronger control measures. CUPE members, locals and health and safety activists should be pushing for the best protections for their members.

When choosing controls, don’t forget other hazards and how they might be affected by new controls (for example, the hazard of working alone while practicing physical distancing and reduced number of people in the workplace or the PPE needed for cleaning). Also ensure that controls do not introduce new hazards into the workplace.

All the following sample hazard controls should be considered in addition to any other legislative and regulatory requirements such as policies and procedures for working alone, preventing violence, and so on.

Workers have a unique and important perspective in evaluating the effectiveness of controls proposed by the employer as they understand best how these tasks are performed in practice and what impediments there may be to implement administrative controls.

Remember: control of hazards related to COVID-19 are just one part of a much larger employer health and safety program. **All the following hazard controls must be continuously monitored, evaluated, updated and revised in conjunction with your Health and Safety Committee or representative.**

Hazard Controls for food services:

Elimination

Workplaces should be designed to remove hazards whenever possible. All employers must take every precaution reasonable to eliminate the potential of exposure to COVID-19. The virus can be easily spread among workers and students/customers where required controls are not in place. As such, employers must eliminate the possibility of anyone with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 from accessing the workplace.

In food service and preparation work consider some of these elimination controls:

- Workers who are sick must remain home. Employers should have clear rules around paid self-isolation and quarantine for those who are sick, or those who have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19. These plans should include how to handle situations with infected family members.
- Cancel all in-person non-critical programs until further notice.
- Conduct programs and meetings using a shared communications program (Facetime/Skype/zoom).
- Reduce the use of paper that will be handled by multiple workers with the use of electronic documents.
- Meetings with external visitors (ex. delivery services) should be pre-screened by phone or computer before appointments are scheduled using the most recent medical definitions for COVID-19 from provincial health officers, Ministry of Health and / or Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Engineering controls

This category of controls involves using barriers or separations to prevent employees from being exposed to hazards. For example, plexiglass barriers and other hard or soft material (including vinyl) surfaces have become a common application during the COVID-19 pandemic, installed at points of contact with students/customers, contractors or other staff or when two metres (six feet) of distance cannot be maintained in all directions.

Wherever possible, it is better to create permanent or semi-permanent barriers before utilizing administrative controls or personal protective equipment. For example, many of us have become accustomed to seeing plexiglass barriers for cashiers at the grocery store that separates them from the customers.

For food services workers, consider some of these engineering controls:

- Install barriers so that communication between staff and students/customers is made behind plexiglass. This includes entrances, service points, and cash registers to ensure staff are separated from patrons.
- Barriers should also be set up between workstations where physical distancing cannot be maintained. Where this is not possible, ensure that workstations and equipment such as utensils and aprons are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between each use.

- Where feasible, use physical barriers to ensure single direction movements coming in and out of kitchens and common eating areas (ex. cafeterias or lunch rooms)
- Set up separate food prep and pick-up areas.
- Use foot operated or open lid (no touch) garbage cans.
- If it is practical, workers should use the same workstation and tools each day.
- Ventilation systems can play an important role in preventing the spread of infections though the utilization of filters that catch the majority of particles and adjusting the system to mix in more fresh air. Ensure that workplace ventilation systems are operating as designed and inspected according to manufacturer specifications.
- The furniture layout of workplaces should be used to promote physical distancing such as removing chairs around tables to promote a minimum of two metres (six feet) distance between others for seating. Remove some of the tables and chairs in eating areas to ensure physical distancing. The remaining tables and chairs should be cleaned and disinfected after every use.
- Where physical barriers are not feasible, visual markers (such as tape on ground and signage) should be used to help promote physical distancing and to indicate single direction travel paths within the cafeterias and kitchen.
- Limit the number of people that can enter common eating areas (ex. cafeteria) at one time.
- Stagger break times to reduce numbers of staff in close proximity in break rooms.
- Some washrooms should be designated exclusively for workers.
- Where possible, designate a single point of entry, and a different single point of exit.
- Distribute disinfecting and sanitization materials so that they are available to the workers and students/customers at point of use for all work sites.
- **Screening** (engineering considerations)
 - Implementing a process for effective and mandatory screening protocols by trained workers when entering the facility will help ensure people with COVID-19 symptoms are identified and not allowed access to the building.
 - Screening must apply to all who enter the building (staff, students, customers, essential visitors, external agencies and contractors etc.).
 - Ensure people can only enter a building through an entrance where screening takes place.
 - Where possible, in person screening should be done through engineered barriers (such as Plexiglas) or appropriate PPE must be supplied to the persons doing the screening (see below).
 - Screening processes may include self-assessment, on-site screening (from two meters (six feet) and with appropriate controls) with daily logs kept for all visitors, students, customers and staff entering the building, and phone calls to members/contractors.

Administrative Controls

Administrative controls are workplace rules that control or alter the way the work is done. These may include things like the timing of work, policies and work practices such as standards and operating procedures.

In food services workplaces consider some of these additional administrative controls:

- Employers must develop a comprehensive Exposure Control Plan, including ongoing hazard assessments (more than one may be required as circumstances, hazards and risks change) when anyone is confirmed or in contact with cases of COVID-19 or after having travelled internationally.
- If in-person meetings must happen limit meetings and hold meetings outside or in a large space to allow for physical distancing of at least two metres (six feet) between people.
- Food must always be protected from contamination. This may include ensuring guards or coverings for food, and utensils.
- As much as possible, practice physical distancing between co-workers, those who use food services, and essential external visitors.
- Employers must have written COVID-19 policies, standard operating procedures and training programs for all classifications as part of their overall occupational health and safety information programs.
- Develop a method of clear and effective communication to workers because of how quickly information is changing. Workers need to *know what to do* in response to the changing working conditions.
- Update the Pandemic Plan, in consultation with the health and safety committee as often as necessary to protect workers.
- When possible, physical distancing should be maintained, otherwise appropriate PPE must be provided (see below).
- If physical barriers aren't possible, communication should be done at distances greater than two metres (six feet).
- Where job tasks require groups of workers to work routinely in proximity, consider creating cohorts, or small groups of workers that work together exclusively to reduce the risk of broader transmission to other workers.
- Discontinue self service for all uncovered food items or items that require sharing of utensils such as salad bars or buffets.
- Pre-package all food items and cutlery.
- Remove all shared food items such as large jugs of coffee creamers, water jugs, large condiment bottles, salt and pepper shakers, etc.
- Encourage the use of pre-paid food orders and contactless methods of payment such as debit and credit. Disinfect payment machine after every use.
- Encourage the phoning in of orders for delivery or pick-up outside.
- Transition all documents such as food temperature checks to electronic format to eliminate the need to handle paper between workers.

Screening (administrative considerations)

- Employers need to provide appropriate training for the people staffing the screening areas (see screening in engineering controls above).
- Designated employees should be selected and trained to screen people who would enter the building (these jobs should not be rotated).
- Employers must develop a response plan for how workers direct visitors to not come into eating and work areas and maintain disinfection for when workers or visitors have been identified as suspected or confirmed or have symptoms of COVID-19.
- Staff should self-assess prior to attending work and during their shift.
- Employers need to determine all the processes involved in screening including, what screening will be done, how screening areas will be stocked, how screening areas will be cleaned and sanitized, and how waste management at these areas will be handled.
- Establish a designated area where ill or suspected workers/external people may wait while either being screened or when they are awaiting to go home. This area would have dedicated staff and equipment to ensure proper familiarity with putting on and taking off PPE protocols and other safety processes.
- Ensure that external workers (ex. food delivery) wear appropriate facial coverings and observe proper hygiene practices.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Employers should have a procedure and supplies for hand hygiene (and other exposed areas) for workers and students/customers. that provide people the ability to wash for at least 20 seconds with soap.
- Handwashing or sanitizing stations should be made available in the entrance of the workplace.
- When washing with soap is not possible, workers and students/customers should be supplied with a sanitizing liquid (at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol disinfectant) especially if they have handled money.
- Clean and disinfect the work area and common areas regularly, while identifying and paying attention to frequently touched surfaces such as countertops, doorknobs, and various equipment.
- Develop a checklist/log for items to be cleaned and disinfected as well as the cleaning and disinfection frequency.
- While working, cleaning staff should close off the area to other people.
- Keep a bucket or laundry basket close by for items to be deposited when they need to be cleaned. These should be washed using regular laundry soap and hot water (60-90°C). Laundry should be thoroughly dried.
- Place posters that encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette at the entrance to the workplace and in other areas where they will be seen. Graphics will be more useful than words.

Waste Management

- Have an appropriate waste management system to handle potential and contaminated waste (like used PPE) and ensure that workers know what those processes are.
- Contaminated items used by a person diagnosed or suspected to have COVID-19 should be placed in a plastic bag before disposing of it with other waste (double bagged).
- Wash hands appropriately with soap and water after handling contaminated items (even if gloves were used).
- Contaminated disposable cleaning items such as mop heads, cloths, etc. should be placed in a lined garbage bin before disposing of these items with regular waste via double bagging the items within a main garbage bag. Reusable cleaning items can be washed using regular laundry soap and hot water (60-90°C).

Personal Protective Equipment

PPE is worn by individuals to reduce exposure when in close contact to suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19. Employers must ensure that adequate supplies of PPE are available to workers, and they have been provided training on how and when to use it. PPE is a last resort and the lowest level of hazard control. When considering PPE, keep in mind the following:

- If physical distancing cannot be maintained, workers should be provided, with appropriate personal protective equipment.
- If physical distancing cannot be maintained, workers should be provided, at a minimum, a disposable surgical mask. A fit-tested N-95 respirator (or greater) is preferable.
- The equipment should be properly fitted, including respirator fit testing as necessary.
- Provide disposable gloves if an employee is not able to frequently wash or sanitize their hands and must contact people or surfaces that have not been recently sanitized.
- The employer must provide appropriate training about when PPE must be worn, how it must be put on and taken off, disposed of, inspection for defects, and what its limitations are.
- Determine usage rates of PPE and ensure that there are enough PPE supplies so that workers are not required to share (this applies to either COVID-19-related PPE or regular PPE required to perform duties safely).
- If appropriate PPE cannot be worn or are not available, the worker should be reassigned to another work area. Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work [see fact sheet above].
- All PPE should be assessed for worker allergies or reactions to the PPE materials. If the worker is unable to wear the personal protective equipment, and hypoallergenic

alternatives are not available, the worker should be reassigned to another work area without loss of pay or benefits as a result.

- All PPE should be regularly inspected for defects or damage.
- Ensure staff areas are supplied with:
 - Hand sanitizers – with a concentration of at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol disinfectant;
 - Tissues to catch coughs and sneezes; and
 - Wipes appropriate to ensure clean and disinfected surfaces, especially commonly touched surfaces and equipment (for example, counter tops, door handles, delivery carts).

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