

COVID-19 as a workplace hazard

This bulletin addresses the hazard assessment as it relates to COVID-19. Employers must review and update their hazard assessment to address the changing conditions related to COVID-19.

Key information

- Hazard assessments must be reviewed and updated to reflect current conditions.
- Employers must protect the health and safety of workers at the work site and others at, or around, the work site.
- Hazards related to the COVID-19 virus must be considered during the hazard assessment.

Hazard assessment

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 address 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.

Some factors to consider when assessing the potential hazards from COVID-19 are:

- 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, and
- how other hazards and controls at the work site might affect COVID-19 controls.

Hazard controls

Employers must address all identified hazards. Eliminate a hazard wherever reasonably possible. When a hazard cannot be eliminated, it must be controlled. There is a hierarchy of controls that must be followed.

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. 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 rollout of vaccines provides workers and all Albertans over the age of 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.

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Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Concerns, questions, reporting serious incidents

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton & surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

Notify OHS of health and safety concerns online

alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx

Online incident reporting

Potentially serious, mine or mine site incidents

oir.labour.alberta.ca

OHS website

alberta.ca/ohs

For more information

Employer's toolkit for vaccination

open.alberta.ca/publications/employers-toolkit-for-vaccination#summary

Hazard assessment and control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

Occupational health and safety guidance for workers: respiratory viruses

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/covid19-14

Psychological hazards: returning to the workplace

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/covid19-18

Public health measures in effect

alberta.ca/covid-19-public-health-actions.aspx

Respiratory viruses and the workplace

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bh022

Worker deconditioning following an absence from the workplace

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/covid19-15

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