

As Ontario Begins to Reopen, Provincial Health and Safety Associations Provide Guidance to Employers Regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic presents a myriad of challenges for employers. In addition to the financial and social issues posed by the pandemic, employers are under increased pressure to ensure adequate health and safety standards in the workplace. The Ontario government has, in conjunction with four provincial Health and Safety Associations, compiled more than 60 guidance documents to assist employers to ensure their workplace is safe for their employees and customers. The guidance documents are organized by sector and cover a broad range of subtopics, including guidance on workplace hygiene and sanitation, personal protective equipment, and mental health.

Below is an overview of some key guidance documents. The full list of guidance documents can be found [here](#).

Among the many guidance documents, the following may be especially useful to employers:

- The Infrastructure Health and Safety Association has prepared “[Best Practices for the Employer – Responding to a Suspected COVID-19 Exposure](#)”, for the construction sector, in which many projects have been exempted from the mandatory closures and have remained active throughout the pandemic.
- The Public Service Health and Safety Association has produced “[Health and Safety Guidance During COVID-19 For Employers of Office Settings](#)”, which will become increasingly relevant as offices are gradually reopened under the government’s “Framework for Reopening our Province”. See also our article about the government’s framework [here](#).
- The Workplace Safety and Prevention Services has prepared the “COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidance for Retail Sector”, which provides employers with a lengthy list of procedures and strategies for protecting employees and customers from COVID-19;
- The Workplace Safety and Prevention Services has developed the “COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidance for Executives and Management”, which provides advice to executives and managers whose positions typically involve interaction with a wide variety of individuals;
- The Workplace Safety and Prevention Services has created the “COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidance for Equipment Operators and General Labourers”, which assists labourers and equipment operators with recognizing hazards and assessing risks related to COVID-19 exposure; and

The importance of these guidance documents is amplified by the Ontario government’s announcement that certain businesses and workplaces will be permitted to reopen on Monday, May 4, provided they comply with public health measures. Seasonal businesses such as garden centres and lawn care and landscaping businesses, as well as car washes, automotive dealerships, and select construction sites will all be permitted to reopen. Additionally, golf courses and marinas are permitted to begin preparations for reopening, though they cannot yet reopen. For further details, see the government’s press release, available [here](#).

Even employers who are not yet permitted to reopen should review the applicable guidelines documents now, in order to ensure that operations are entirely compliant with all applicable health and safety standards upon reopening.

WeirFoulds' employment law group is monitoring these developments and will be providing updates as the COVID-19 situation progresses. For more information on how to respond to COVID-19 in your workplace or organization, please contact [Daniel Wong](#), [Sean Foran](#) or [Megan Mah](#).

The information and comments herein are for the general information of the reader and are not intended as advice or opinion to be relied upon in relation to any particular circumstances. For particular application of the law to specific situations, the reader should seek professional advice.

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