

COVID-19 Public Health Guidelines: Employers of Temporary Foreign Farm Workers

Last updated May 10, 2021

This document provides guidance for employers of temporary foreign workers (TFW) to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 on farms. The province is currently under a [province-wide shutdown \(emergency brake\)](#) and [a Province-wide Stay-at-Home Order](#). Residents, organizations and businesses must continue to abide by the public health measures outlined in [Reg. 82/20](#) and [O. Reg. 265/21](#). For specific questions about COVID-19 provincial regulations, please contact the **Stop the Spread Business Information Line** at 1-888-444-3659.

Employers must ensure measures are in place to keep their labour force and the broader community safe from COVID-19, while ensuring compliance with the requirements outlined in the [Occupational Health and Safety Act \(OHSA\)](#).

Employers should also consult the Government of Ontario's agriculture sector [resources](#) and the online toolkit [Working with Farm Operators to Stop the Spread of COVID-19 on Farms](#).

COVID-19 transmission

COVID-19 is spread mainly from person-to-person through the respiratory droplets of someone infected with COVID-19. The respiratory droplets can travel up to two metres (six feet) through coughing, sneezing or talking. COVID-19 can also be transmitted when a person touches a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touches their mouth, nose or eyes.

Variants of concern

Viruses are constantly changing. As a virus makes copies of itself, its genes can make copying errors resulting in mutations of the virus. Many of these mutations have little effect. However, when a mutated virus is shown to spread more quickly or causes severe illness, they are called "variants of concern". In Ontario, variants of concern (VOCs) are becoming more and more common. As VOCs can spread more easily, it is more important than ever to follow public health guidelines.

Instructions from Halton Region's Medical Officer of Health

Halton Region's Medical Officer of Health has issued [instructions to businesses](#) to help them respond quickly and effectively to the risk of a workplace outbreak. These actions will help owners and operators protect their staff, patrons and the community. These include specific actions to take:

- if businesses become aware that a worker at their workplace has COVID-19;
- if businesses become aware that **two or more** workers have COVID-19 within the past 14 days; and
- to protect all workers from COVID-19.

These additional requirements are being issued as Halton continues to see cases of COVID-19 among those who cannot work from home and more workplace outbreaks. With COVID-19 Variants of Concern circulating in the community it is prudent to take a conservative approach to cases involving workplace and community exposures.

The instructions are effective Saturday, May 8, 2021 at 12:01 a.m. They supplement existing requirements from the Province and Halton Region Public Health officials. To read these [instructions](#), please visit halton.ca/COVID19.

Self-isolation for temporary foreign workers upon arrival in Canada

Ensure all temporary foreign workers (TFWs) upon arrival to Canada quarantine for 14 days.

- As of March 21, 2021, all TFWs are exempt from the 3 night overnight stay while they await their test results as long as they are asymptomatic and are not travelling via public transportation. A negative COVID-19 test result is required within 72 hours of arrival. For further information, visit [Quarantine and mandatory testing information for temporary foreign workers](#).
- Maintain a list of names of all workers scheduled to arrive in Canada and their planned date of arrival.
- Provide a separate room or alternative accommodation for workers in quarantine away from others who have active cases of COVID-19. If a new worker arrives and they are placed with those who have already begun quarantining, all of the workers are required to re-start their mandatory quarantine period.
- Provide all necessary amenities (for example, separate washroom, shower) that allows for a minimum 2 metres (six feet) of physical distancing.
- Do not allow workers to work during the 14-day isolation period.
- Arrange for provision of adequate food, potable water, toiletries, laundry and cleaning supplies for workers in isolation.
- Notify Halton Region Public Health if a worker(s) needs to leave the farm for ANY reason during the isolation period (for example, to seek medical attention).
- Monitor the health of workers in isolation.
- Ensure employees understand their rights and entitlements, including access to healthcare services that may be available if a worker becomes sick. Post "[Calling for Help in an Emergency](#)" adjacent to a telephone. (Notice is available in several languages).

Self-isolation when a worker becomes ill

- Workers who become symptomatic at any time must [self-isolate](#) from others, be tested for COVID-19 and not be allowed to work during the self-isolation period.
- Immediately notify Halton Region Public Health if a worker living on the farm tests positive for COVID-19.
- Immediately provide accommodations that enable the worker and their close contacts to isolate from others and must include:
 - A private bedroom and bathroom.
 - Adequate food, potable water, toiletries, laundry and cleaning supplies.
 - Access to a cell phone or landline on an ongoing basis, which is required under public health supervision for case and contact management.
- Monitor the health of workers who are in self-isolation and notify Halton Region Public Health if a worker(s) needs to leave the farm for ANY reason during the isolation period (for example, to seek medical attention).
- Follow the steps outlined in the [instructions for businesses](#) issued by Halton Region's Medical Officer of Health if a worker tests positive for COVID-19.
- If COVID-19 is suspected or diagnosed in a worker, return to work should be determined in consultation with their employer, health care provider and Halton Region Public Health.

Limit workers and contracted employees to one workplace

- Limit all current or future workers and contracted employees to working in one workplace.
- Keep accurate and updated contact information for all employees (permanent, temporary or contract) and third party employers. A list of cohorts should also be maintained.
- Provide contact information to Halton Region Public Health within 24 hours of being requested, for case and contact management.

Additional COVID-19 Public Health Measures

The following COVID-19 Public Health Measures are recommended by Halton Region Public Health and should be considered for all businesses and organizations that are permitted to be open during [province-wide shutdown \(emergency brake\)](#).

Develop a workplace safety plan

- A [safety plan](#) must be available upon request.

Screen workers for COVID-19 symptoms

- Screen all workers daily using the online [COVID-19 Worker and Employee Screening](#) or printable [COVID-19 Screening Tool for Businesses and Organizations \(Screening Workers\)](#).
 - If a worker answers “yes” to a screening question and/or they develop [symptoms](#), direct them to:
 - [self-isolate](#); and
 - Contact their health care provider or book an appointment at a local [Assessment Centre](#) for testing.
- Ensure the screener is separated by a barrier (for example, Plexiglas), or maintains a physical distance of at least 2 metres (six feet) from those being screened or wears personal protective equipment (PPE) (surgical/procedure mask, gown, gloves, eye protection), and alcohol-based (60-90% alcohol) hand rub is provided.
- Instruct workers to [self-monitor](#) for symptoms such as fever, cough or difficulty breathing.

Provide education and signage

- Educate workers on [public health measures](#) to prevent the spread of COVID-19, considering reading level and language preference, and COVID-19 signage is clearly posted at appropriate locations at the farm:
 - do not work if [COVID-19 symptoms](#) develop, immediately self-isolate and notify employer
 - maintain [physical distance](#) of 2 metres (6 feet) from others
 - practice proper [hand hygiene](#)
 - sneeze and cough into your sleeve or a tissue
 - avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth frequently
 - encourage workers not to share personal items (e.g. towels, soap, water bottles)
- Find additional resources, including COVID-19 posters and tip sheets available in several languages, on the [Government of Ontario Agriculture health and safety during COVID-19](#) website.

Maximize physical distancing and reduce physical contact

- Ensure measures are in place to support physical distancing of two metres (six feet) between individuals where possible which may include:
 - providing additional accommodations with private rooms or rooms with the fewest number of occupants;
 - placing beds head to foot or foot to foot in shared bedrooms and minimizing the use of bunk beds;
 - ensuring appropriate spacing in common areas (for example, break areas, living rooms);
 - using signs to encourage [physical distancing](#);
 - closing alternating stalls in washrooms, where appropriate;
 - limiting the number of people working in any given space at the same time;
 - staggering start times, shifts, breaks and lunch times;
 - installing barriers (for example, Plexiglas) between workers, where practical and;
 - maximizing fresh air exchange, where possible.
- Assign workers to a consistent group (cohort) that is separated from other individuals and teams, (for example, workers who share a living space, work area, the same shifts, breaks, etc.). The size of each cohort should be kept as small as possible.

- Within each cohort, workers should maintain a two metre (six feet) physical distance from other workers.
 - Minimize mixing between cohorts, including any social activities.
 - Temporary agency workers should be kept in a separate cohort from other workers.
- Transport workers within cohorts and ensure they wear a mask, practice respiratory etiquette, and keep windows open to improve fresh air intake (depending on weather). Disinfect high-touch surfaces (for example, door handles) frequently using a disinfectant wipe. A seating chart should be maintained for contact tracing purposes.
- For additional resources, review the [Congregate Living Setting Resources Toolkit](#).

Wear a mask and use personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Provide [masks](#) and ensure they are worn by workers in indoor work areas, in vehicles and when physical distancing cannot be maintained, including outdoors. [Consolidated By-law 47-20](#), allows exemptions for persons with underlying medical conditions such as when wearing a mask would inhibit the person's ability to breath.
- Ensure [masks](#) and eye protection are worn by workers when they are within two metres (six feet) of another person who is not wearing a mask and when there is no physical barrier between them.
- Train staff on the [proper use](#), removal and disposal of non-medical masks.
- Assess the appropriateness of masks and PPE for situations, consider the potential for health and safety issues created by masks (e.g. getting caught in machinery), work accommodations (e.g. health conditions and communication) and environmental conditions.
- Masks can be removed when eating or drinking but physical distancing of two metres (six feet) between individuals must be maintained.
- Masks do not replace other important public health measures, such as screening, physical distancing, proper hand hygiene, coughing and sneezing into a tissue or sleeve.

Keep hands and surfaces clean

- Have all workers practice frequent [hand hygiene](#) before entering the workplace and after contact with high-touch surfaces.
- Ensure hand wash sinks are available with hot and cold running water, liquid soap in a dispenser and paper towels. Use paper towels instead of hand dryers where hands-free taps are not available, in order to prevent recontamination of hands when turning off taps.
- Provide alcohol-based (60%-90% alcohol) hand rub when there is no access to soap and water and of hands are not visibly dirty.
- Conduct frequent [cleaning and disinfection](#) of all high touch surfaces and common areas including: door handles, doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, counters, hand rails, faucets, restrooms, touch screens, key pads and dispensers at least twice a day and when visibly dirty.
- Use products that are [approved by Health Canada](#), with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) and follow the manufacturer's instructions for use.
- Keep a cleaning record to monitor cleaning frequency.
- Provide cleaning supplies, including paper towels, household cleaning and disinfection products, dish soap and laundry soap and personal protective equipment, as appropriate.
- Limit sharing of farm equipment, where possible; limit number of workers using equipment, assign each worker to their own piece of equipment, or disinfect shared equipment between uses.

Additional Resources

- Halton Region Public Health:
 - [Cleaning practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19](#)
 - [Instructions for businesses issued by Halton Region's Medical Officer of Health](#)

- [Mental Health Resources and Supports](#)
- Government of Ontario:
 - [Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace](#) (English and Spanish)
 - [COVID-19 and Workplace Health and Safety](#)
 - [COVID-19 Screening Tool for Businesses and Organizations \(Screening Workers\)](#)
 - [COVID-19 Self Assessment Tool](#)
 - [Working With Farm Operators to Stop the Spread of COVID-19 on Farms](#)
 - [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#)
 - [Develop your COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#)
- Ministry of Health:
 - [Guidance for Temporary Foreign Workers](#)
 - [COVID-19 Guidance: On-Farm Outbreak Management](#)
- Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development:
 - [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)
- Workplace Safety & Prevention Services:
 - [Guidance on Health and Safety for Agricultural Employers Using Temporary Help During COVID-19](#)
- Government of Canada:
 - [Guidance for Employers of Temporary Foreign Workers Regarding COVID-19](#)
 - [COVID:19 A Guide for Temporary Foreign Workers in Canada](#)
 - [Quarantine and mandatory testing information for temporary foreign workers](#)

More information

For more information and updates, visit halton.ca/COVID19. For specific questions about COVID-19 provincial regulations, please contact the **Stop the Spread Business Information Line** at 1-888-444-3659.