

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Essential Worker Recommendations

Protecting Essential Workers with Underlying Health Conditions

Updated April 18, 2020

Some sectors have posed questions regarding the [Ministry Self-Assessment Tool](#) and its guidance for individuals with *compromised immune systems and underlying health conditions*. The Ontario Government encourages those with compromised immune systems and underlying health conditions (e.g. diabetes) to self-isolate. Concerns have been raised that this could have a significant impact on the workforce (and public safety).

The Government of Ontario has not provided specific guidance for essential workers who, using the Ministry Self-Assessment Tool, would identify as needing to self-isolate, particularly based on compromised immune systems and underlying health conditions.

The following direction is provided by the Southwestern Public Health Medical Officer of Health as guidance only. It has not been endorsed by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer or Health or other health units.

Definition of Essential Worker

- 1) A worker
 - a. of an industry that is necessary for the health, safety, and preservation of the public welfare and,
 - b. is indispensable for the industry to provide critical service and,
 - c. is not replaceable by an alternate worker of the critical service, or a temporary hire

Any essential workers with any of the conditions below are at higher risk for severe COVID-19 if exposed.

- 70+ years of age
- Condition that affects my immune system (for example, HIV/AIDS)
- Chronic health condition (for example, diabetes, heart condition)

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- Treatment that affects the immune system (for example, chemotherapy)

For essential workers with these conditions, consideration should be given to the mitigation of exposure risk. If the workplace is unable to mitigate risk, consideration should be given to excluding the worker. Interventions worthy of consideration include the following:

Isolate the worker from an exposure

- Work from home
- Work alone in a single room
- Work behind a barrier
- Minimize or avoid unprotected interactions with the general public
- Ready excess to hand hygiene

Reduce the risk of an exposure

- Provide the worker with a mask and glasses to use when with other individuals
- Provide education on safe donning and doffing of masks and glasses and safe disposal
- Ensure that individuals in the same room remain 6 feet or 2 meters from the worker
- Ask other workers to wear a mask when working with the worker
- Instruct all staff to use hand hygiene prior to an interaction with the staff member

Ensure workplace infection prevention practices

- Have written procedures regarding infection prevention practices in the workplace
- Audit the workplace for adherence to procedures
- Screen all staff for illness prior to arriving at work
- Ensure effective environmental cleaning at regular intervals
- Clean high touch surfaces several times a day
- Supply all workers with hand sanitizer