

Protect Yourself and Others: Control Measures for Respiratory Infectious Diseases (RIDs)



Introduction

This tip sheet provides information on personal protective measures and workplace health and safety control measures to protect against respiratory infectious diseases. It can help employers develop policies and procedures to protect workers and others from the spread of these diseases. It also provides guidance on how workers can protect themselves. The recommendations in this document are broad and can be used in a variety of workplace settings, including banks, community centres, construction, manufacturing, museums, places of worship, and retail. Employers should tailor health and safety control measures to their workplace. For information specific to funeral homes, homeless service providers, accommodations, work camps, long-term care, educational services, health care, transportation, or emergency services, refer to [workplace-specific tip sheets](#).

Always follow current guidance from local public health and government authorities about recommended protective measures.

As a worker

- Stay informed, be prepared, and follow public health advice
- Use trusted information sources, such as [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) and your local public health authority
- Stay up to date with vaccinations against respiratory infectious diseases, like COVID-19 and the flu
- Monitor yourself for indications of illness. [Know the symptoms and contagious periods](#) of common respiratory diseases (refer to the Resources section for more information)
- If you feel sick:
 - Stay at home and away from others
 - Inform your supervisor
 - If symptoms continue or become severe, contact your health care provider for advice or seek immediate medical attention
- If you become sick while at work:
 - Immediately put on a mask (choose the best quality and best fitting respirator or mask available to you)
 - Inform your supervisor that you feel sick
 - Go home and stay away from others
- Practise proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- Wear a mask when:
 - Working in a crowded or poorly ventilated area
 - Advised by the local public health authority or employer
 - Seasonal increases in respiratory infectious diseases occur
 - Deemed appropriate based on personal risk factors and preferences
- Exercise your worker's [rights](#) to:
 - Know about health and safety matters including potential exposures to pathogens (germs), and to be provided with information, instructions, education, training, and supervision
 - Participate in decisions that could affect your health and safety. You can join or support your health and safety committee, report concerns, and provide input
 - Refuse unsafe work that could affect your health and safety and that of others. Follow the work refusal process that has been established for your jurisdiction
- Meet your worker's obligations to:
 - Attend training and follow your employer's safe work procedures (e.g., how to protect yourself and your coworkers from respiratory infectious diseases)
 - Immediately report any health and safety concerns to your employer, supervisor, health and safety committee or representative, or union if you have one

As an employer

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- Encourage workers to stay home when they:
 - Feel sick, even with mild symptoms
 - May have been exposed to a respiratory infectious disease (e.g., COVID-19, Influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus, etc.) and work in a setting where individuals are more likely to experience serious complications from respiratory infections
 - Test positive for a respiratory infectious disease
- Promote vaccination against respiratory infectious diseases in the workplace (e.g., provide education on vaccination, schedule vaccination clinics at the workplace, allow time away from work to get vaccinated)
- Implement [screening protocols](#) when there is increased risk of infection such as during a season of circulating respiratory infections (e.g., flu season), or in settings where people are at greater risk of complications (e.g., long term care homes)
- Ensure appropriate indoor ventilation in all occupied areas
- Encourage workers to clean and disinfect their personal workspaces often and provide them with the necessary supplies
- Have written procedures about cleaning, disinfecting, proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, etc.
- Post easy to understand, language-appropriate signs and pictures to help people follow procedures
- Adjust control measures as appropriate to best protect all workers. Consider how precautions may differ for those who are at higher risk of serious complications from respiratory infections
- Follow public health and occupational health and safety requirements and guidelines that apply to your services and activities from federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments
- Identify [hazards](#) and perform a [risk assessment](#) for all of your facilities and services to determine where and how to apply protective measures
- Do not create new hazards when implementing control measures (e.g., propping fire doors open to improve ventilation increases the fire risk)
- Ensure that workers and supervisors are trained and understand their roles and responsibilities regarding respiratory infectious diseases at work
- Involve your health and safety committee or representative when assessing workplace risks and determining measures to lower risks, including when there is a requirement for personal protective equipment (PPE) and training
- Develop and communicate policies and procedures that clearly explain workplace procedures to prevent the spread of infections (e.g., emergency response plan that explains [how to respond to a sick individual in the workplace](#), sick leave policy, etc.)

Workplaces that regularly interact with the public

- Inform customers, visitors, inspectors, and any others entering the workplace, about respiratory infectious disease protocols that might affect them
- Ask that sick individuals refrain from entering the workplace unless necessary
- Waive expenses for individuals who cancel appointments due to illness
- Encourage remote appointments for activities that may take long (e.g., using video calls to see a financial advisor at a bank or receive counselling)
- Promote digital methods for purchases (e.g., digital tickets from a website or mobile app)
- Provide contactless payment options such as tap-to-pay
- Promote self-service for tasks that would normally require workers to handle items touched by members of the public (e.g., customers may scan their own tickets at a kiosk or handle their own luggage in taxis)

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- If an individual experiencing symptoms of a respiratory infectious disease must enter the workplace, consider the following precautions:
 - Ask that the sick individual avoid close contact with others
 - Recommend that the sick individual wear a suitable mask (preferably an N95 respirator or medical mask)
 - Avoid close in-person interactions with the sick individual. Consider remote communication options, if necessary
 - Wear appropriate personal protective equipment and practice proper hand hygiene when providing services to sick individuals
- Continue following food hygiene practices (e.g., properly wash dishes and utensils between patrons, modify practices to reduce sharing of utensils)
- Have disposable masks available for distribution to members of the public

Control measures that can reduce the risk of respiratory infectious disease transmission

No single control measure is 100% effective. A layered approach that combines public health measures and workplace health and safety controls provides the strongest protection against exposure to respiratory infectious diseases. With each added layer of control, the risk of exposure is lowered. Below is a summary of control measures, with added links to more in-depth guidance documents.

Vaccination

One of the most effective ways to help protect against respiratory infectious diseases is to keep up to date with vaccinations (e.g., influenza, COVID-19). Workers should refer to their health care provider or public health authority for more information, such as vaccination requirements or schedules.

Benefits of getting vaccinated include:

- Reduces the chance of becoming sick, if exposed
- Reduces the chance of serious illness and hospitalization after becoming sick

For more information refer to:

- [Vaccines and immunization](#) – Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

Staying home when sick

Workers should be encouraged to stay home and limit contact with others when sick, even if symptoms are mild. This will help prevent others in the workplace from getting sick. Employers should offer sick leave and not penalize workers for absences related to respiratory infectious diseases. Workers may seek medical attention at their discretion.

Remote and hybrid workers should be encouraged to rest and follow the same guidance when sick.

Ventilation

Good ventilation can decrease the concentration of respiratory particles in the air and help reduce the spread of respiratory infectious diseases.

Some ways to improve ventilation include:

- Upgrading HVAC system filters to the highest rated Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) they are compatible with
- Using High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters (if the HVAC system supports them)
- Running ventilation systems continuously at low speed. Alternatively, run systems for 2 hours at maximum airflow before and after the space is occupied
- Adjusting the system to maximize outdoor air intake to provide more air dilution in a space

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- Opening windows and doors to allow outside air in, as weather permits and if it does not pose a safety risk to the occupants (e.g., risk of falling)
- Continuously running exhaust fans in washrooms and kitchens, even when the space is not occupied
- Appropriately ventilate vehicles by:
 - Opening windows, if safe and weather permitting
 - Setting ventilation systems to use outside air instead of recirculating air
- Conduct activities and events outdoors, when possible, and plan for any impacts of weather that may force an outdoor event into an unprepared indoor space

For more information refer to:

- [Indoor Ventilation for Respiratory Infectious Diseases](#) - CCOHS

Proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol:
 - Before and after touching a mask or PPE
 - After using the washroom
 - After touching high-touch surfaces and objects
 - Before and after eating or handling food
 - After coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose
 - After shaking someone's hand
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, dispose of tissue immediately, and wash or sanitize your hands immediately afterwards
- If your hands are visibly dirty, you should wash them with soap and water instead of using hand sanitizer

Some specific measures that can promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette at work include:

- Train workers to wash or sanitize hands at appropriate times
- Provide hand washing stations or hand sanitizer dispensers (with a minimum of 60% alcohol content) in high-traffic and strategic areas (e.g., entrances, dining areas, near elevators, etc.). Regularly check and restock dispensers
- Provide personal hand sanitizer to workers who do not have quick access to hand washing facilities or hand sanitizer dispensers (e.g., drivers)
- Replace hard-copy documents (e.g., menus, training manuals, etc.) with electronic versions
- Assign equipment to each worker, if possible (e.g., clipboards, pens, etc.)
- Provide and frequently empty lined garbage bins for used tissues
- Avoid sharing personal items such as masks, straws, cups, towels, or instruments

For more information refer to:

- [Prevent the Spread](#) - CCOHS
- [Prevent the Spread of Infections](#) - CCOHS

Communication, awareness, and training

Lack of awareness or misinformation about respiratory infectious disease risks can result in low compliance with control measures. Employers must provide accurate information and training on the practical skills needed to help prevent the spread of respiratory infectious diseases in the workplace. Communication should include policies and procedures, and the rights and responsibilities of workers, supervisors, and others.

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For more information refer to:

- [Respiratory Infectious Diseases Communication and Training](#) - CCOHS

Screening

Screening is a control measure that can help to identify people who may be infected with a respiratory infectious disease. It is not normally required in most workplaces, but can be implemented where there is an increased risk of infection, or in settings where individuals are at greater risk of complications (e.g., remote mining camps, long-term care homes, etc.).

For more information refer to:

- [Screening for Respiratory Infectious Diseases \(RIDs\)](#)

Cleaning and disinfecting

Touching high-touch surfaces and using shared objects can increase the risk of respiratory infectious disease transmission in the workplace. Employers can protect their workers and others by developing a cleaning and disinfecting program. Cleaning surfaces and objects removes debris and residues, while disinfecting destroys or inactivates the germs. Cleaning should be performed prior to disinfecting.

For more information refer to:

- [Cleaning and Disinfecting for Respiratory Infectious Diseases](#) - CCOHS
- [Using Cleaning and Disinfecting Together Against Respiratory Infectious Diseases](#) - CCOHS

Using personal protective equipment (PPE)

There are many different types of PPE that can minimize workers' exposure to respiratory infectious diseases and other respiratory hazards including:

- Respirators and medical masks
- Eye protection (e.g., face shield, goggles)
- Gloves
- Medical gowns

Workers may be required to wear PPE when:

- Providing direct care or medical treatment to a person with a respiratory infectious disease
- Using cleaning and disinfecting products

Select PPE based on the type of hazard and the risk of exposure to the worker. PPE requirements may also be specified by your [jurisdiction](#).

Additional considerations for PPE include:

- Assign workers their own PPE, if possible. Clean and disinfect equipment between wearers if sharing cannot be avoided
- Discard disposable PPE into a lined garbage bin container after each use
- Clean, disinfect, and store reusable PPE in a clean, dry place when not in use
- Avoid putting potentially contaminated PPE in places they could spread pathogens (e.g., in pockets used to keep personal items such as a phone, on top a table used for eating, etc.)

For more information refer to:

- [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) for Respiratory Infectious Diseases](#) - CCOHS
- [Masks for Respiratory Infectious Diseases](#) - CCOHS

Resources

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Common respiratory infectious disease symptoms and contagious periods

Common respiratory infectious disease symptoms and contagious periods table

Infectious Disease	Main symptoms	Contagious period
Influenza	Fever, muscle pain, cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, fatigue, headaches, diarrhea	1 day before the first symptoms until approximately 5 days after
COVID-19	Fever, muscle pain, cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, fatigue, headaches, new loss of smell or taste, diarrhea	2-3 days before showing symptoms until approximately 10 days after
Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)	Fever, coughing, runny nose, wheezing	1-2 days prior to symptoms until 3-8 days after
Measles	Fever, runny nose, red eyes, cough, rash	4 days prior to the rash until 4 days after the rash appears
Pertussis	Fever, runny nose, red eyes, prolonged cough (can last 2-8 weeks after other symptoms have subsided)	For 3 weeks from onset of cough (can be shortened if appropriate antibiotic treatment is received)
Pneumococcus	Fever, cough, shortness of breath, muscle pain, fatigue, headache	Until 24h after the appropriate antibiotic treatment is started
Haemophilus influenzae B	Fever, cough, shortness of breath, muscle pain, fatigue, headache	Until appropriate antibiotic treatment has been received
Group A streptococcus	Fever, sore throat (pharyngitis), can cause a rash	Until 24h after the appropriate antibiotic treatment is started
Tuberculosis	Prolonged cough, fever, chills, night sweats, fatigue, weight loss	From the onset of cough until at least 2 weeks after appropriate treatment is initiated, and as confirmed by a medical professional

For further information on respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19, refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/covid-19.html).

Disclaimer: As public and occupational health and safety information may continue to change, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency, and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.