

# **COVID-19 Four Step Risk Assessment and Mitigation Guide for Community Non-Profit Services and Programs**

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*This document provides public health guidance to help community non-profit sector agencies reduce the spread of COVID-19 while delivering services and programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery. Toronto Public Health is not responsible for any misinterpretation or misuse of this guide.*

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# Overview

This document provides public health guidance to help community non-profit sector agencies reduce the spread of COVID-19 while services and programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery. It includes four basic steps that should be taken to protect staff, volunteers, clients and visitors:

**Step 1:** Learn and stay informed about how COVID-19 spreads.

**Step 2:** Assess the risk of COVID-19 spread in the community service setting.

**Step 3:** Reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread by making changes to the services provided or the community service setting.

**Step 4:** Seek advice, as needed.

The information in this guide does not replace prevailing Emergency Orders or any information about public health, labour relations, employment standards or occupational health and safety published by the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario or Toronto Public Health.

## Emergency Orders:

*The Province of Ontario has implemented various [Emergency Orders](#), under s.7.0.2 (4) of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. Any service changes implemented in Toronto must conform to the prevailing Provincial Order and to [orders, directives and by-laws](#) implemented by the City of Toronto.*

*The Province of Ontario regularly updates the list of workplaces that can be reopened. Agencies should refer to the list of [essential workplaces](#) for more information.*

## Step 1: LEARN

Knowledge about COVID-19 is rapidly evolving. As a result, guidance may change as new evidence emerges and as we proceed through new phases of pandemic recovery. Staying informed about COVID-19 will help community agencies make decisions about how to safely deliver programs and services.

The [City of Toronto](#), the [Government of Ontario](#), and the [Government of Canada](#) provide reliable and current information about COVID-19.

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, agencies will need to continuously review the risks for clients, volunteers, employees, and visitors. Agencies may need to revise or implement new risk mitigation measures over time.

### Emergency Orders, Directives and By-Laws

Many community non-profit services are declared [essential workplaces](#) during the Pandemic. The Province regularly updates the list of non-essential workplaces that may reopen. Know the law and keep up to date about provincial [Emergency Orders](#) and City of Toronto [orders, directives and by-laws](#) that may affect your agency during the Pandemic recovery.

### How COVID-19 Spreads

COVID-19 spreads through direct contact with respiratory droplets of someone who is infected with the virus through their cough, or sneeze. These droplets can spread up to 2

metres, or 6 feet. It is important to note that how easily a virus spreads from person-to-person can vary. It may also be possible for a person to get COVID-19 by touching a surface, or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. People who are infected with COVID-19 may have mild, severe, or no symptoms. As a result, there is the possibility of asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic spread of COVID-19.

### Contamination of Surfaces

The COVID-19 virus can survive for up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel and less than 24 hours on cardboard [WHO, 2020](#). The virus is easily eliminated on surfaces by using common household cleaning disinfectant products, or chlorine bleach solutions.

### At-Risk Populations

The risk of severe illness from COVID-19 is greater for older adults, people with an underlying medical condition or a weakened immune system. People living on a low income, people who are underhoused or experiencing homelessness, and those who live in congregate settings such as retirement homes or rooming houses may be disproportionately impacted by the virus. Agencies should consider the vulnerability of employees, volunteers, clients and visitors when planning their services and programs and developing risk mitigation approaches.

### Treatment

At this time, there is no vaccine or treatment for COVID-19. People who have COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 are encouraged to [get tested](#) and to seek medical advice through Telehealth (1-866-797-0000) or their local healthcare provider.

## Step 2: ASSESS RISKS

Agencies should use information about how COVID-19 spreads to review each of the spaces in their service setting or workplace and identify the level of risk. A risk assessment should take into consideration all of the people who may be present in a setting at the same time, inclusive of all clients, volunteers, employees and visitors.

An **easy-to-use tool** for COVID-19 risk assessment and risk mitigation planning can be found at the end of this guide. Sample scenarios that can be adapted for different community service settings are included.

Four factors are important for assessing risk of COVID-19 spread in a community service setting:<sup>1,2</sup>

- Number of Contacts
- Contact Intensity (Distance & Duration)
- Vulnerable Populations
- Potential for Risk Mitigation

**Number of Contacts** is the number of people in the setting at the same time, on average (inclusive of all clients, volunteers, employees and visitors). A higher number of people at the same time in an area will increase the risk of virus transmission.

Use the following thresholds:

- Lower risk = fewer than 5 people

- Moderate risk = between 5 and 50 people
- Higher risk = more than 50 people.

**Contact Intensity** is the level of contact among all the people in the setting at the same time, on average (inclusive of all people present). It includes the *distance* between people, the *duration* of their contact and is affected by the type of activity, the location, and vulnerability of participants.

Use the following thresholds:

- Lower risk = contact that is *brief* (a few seconds or minutes) and *distant* (at least 2 metres/6 feet apart), like walking past someone in a wide hallway.
- Higher risk = prolonged close contact (more than 15 minutes; closer than 2 metres/6 feet), like eating a meal together, or a having a counselling session in a small consultation room.
- Moderate risk falls *between* these two extremes.

**Activity:** Activities and behaviours that increase droplet spread, like singing, shouting, crying or sports, are higher risk.

**Location:** Outdoor settings are lower risk than indoor settings due to increased ventilation and opportunities for physical distancing.

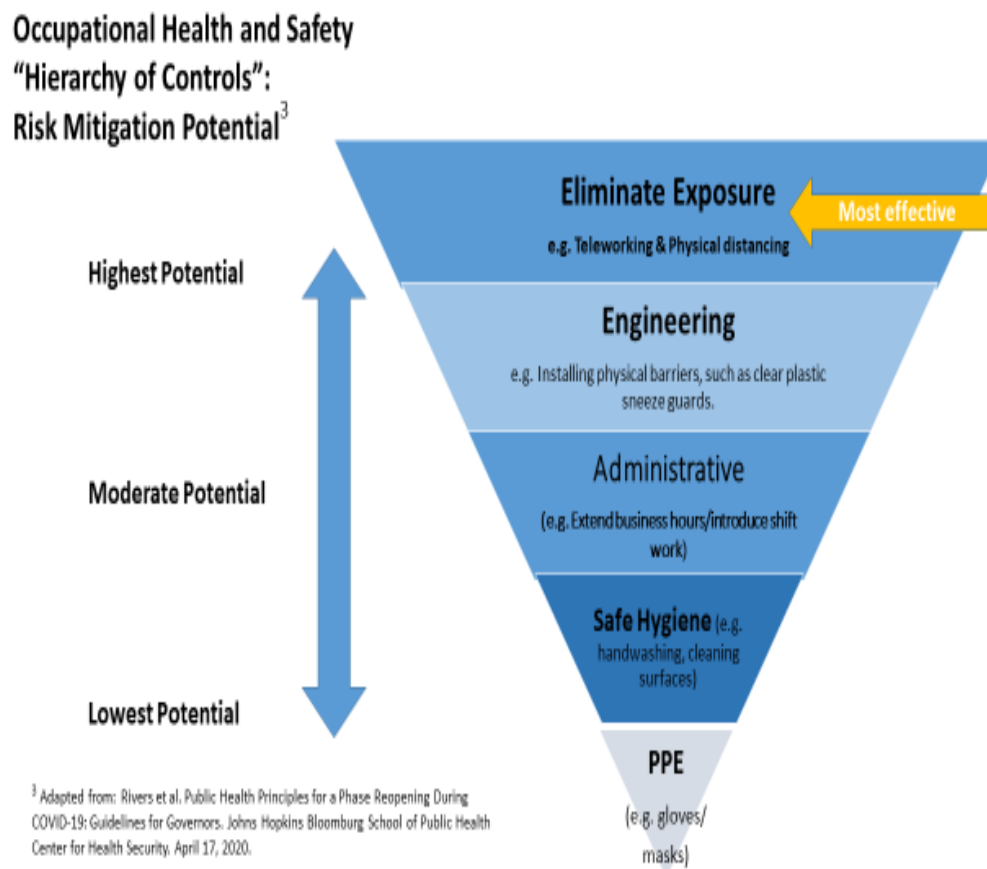
**At-Risk Populations:** Contact with people who are more vulnerable to infection and negative outcomes from COVID-19 creates higher levels of risk (See page 4).

<sup>1</sup> Rivers et al. Public Health Principles for a Phase Reopening During COVID-19: Guidelines for Governors. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Health Security. April 17, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Risk Informed Decision-making Guidelines for Workplaces and Businesses during the COVID-19 Pandemic. April 2020.

**Potential for Risk Mitigation** is the degree to which settings and activities can be modified to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure. The most effective ways to reduce risk of COVID-19 spread are to eliminate exposure to the virus, by providing services remotely or through physical distancing. Agencies that can eliminate or reduce exposure by working remotely or by implementing barriers, have higher potential to mitigate risk than agencies that must rely primarily on personal protective equipment. See the Figure 1, below, “*Occupational Health and Safety Hierarchy of Controls*” and the discussion on page 7 for a summary of options.

**Figure 1:**



## Step 3: REDUCE THE RISKS

The next step is to develop a COVID-19 risk mitigation plan for the various settings where services are developed and delivered.

Agencies understand their operations best and are the most suited to develop their own plans, using guidance published by reliable public health and occupational health and safety resources, and by consulting with partners who work in similar service settings.

Most agencies will need to implement multiple measures to address a range of risk situations in their settings. For example an agency's plan may include transferring some services to teleworking, reducing program class sizes, creating floor markings and removing furniture to promote physical distancing, installing physical barriers such as sneeze guards at counters and in consultation rooms, and revising the work schedule to limit the number of volunteers and employees onsite at one time.

Modifications should be guided by current provincial orders, relevant Toronto Public Health guidance and the "Hierarchy of Controls" (See Figure 1, page 6) that ranks different methods of controlling the spread of COVID-19. These include, from highest to lowest impact:

1. **Eliminate the exposure** – physical distancing is most effective and important method of preventing the spread COVID-19. Examples of measures that promote physical distancing include providing online services and virtual meetings, cancelling group events, closing/limiting use of shared spaces, and ensuring people remain at least 2 metres, or 6 feet apart.
2. **Engineering controls** – are structural modifications to the service setting that minimize contact among people. These may include the use of additional rooms, configuring partitions as a barrier shield, and removing or rearranging furniture, or transferring activities outdoors.
3. **Administrative controls** – are modifications to behavior and service provision that reduce the number of contacts or contact intensity (distance or duration) among people. Examples include limiting the number of clients who attend programs at the same time, changing program hours and working in shifts and curbside pick-up.
4. **Safe work and hygiene practices** - are on-the-job activities that reduce the potential for exposure. This can be done by providing training in hand hygiene and reminding clients, volunteers, employees and visitors to stay home if they are ill.
5. **Personal protective equipment**. This equipment can help to reduce transmission of the virus, but must be used properly to be effective and should not replace other prevention strategies.

## Step 4: SEEK ADVICE, AS NEEDED

Toronto Public Health and other reliable sources provide guidance to support community agencies reduce the spread of COVID-19 while delivering services and programs. COVID-19 guidance is constantly being added and updated as new services and workplaces are permitted are permitted to re-open and as knowledge of COVID-19 evolves.

Visit [www.toronto.ca/COVID19](https://www.toronto.ca/COVID19) regularly for new information to guide your agency's COVID-19 response.

Contact Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600.

### Protective Measures to Keep Everyone Safe

- Handwashing:  
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/videos/ipac-handwash>
- Physical Distancing:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/95d3-Community-Partners-Physical-Distancing-Spread-Reduction.pdf>

- Advice on the Use of Masks in the Context of COVID-19.  
<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1279750/retrieve>
- Non-Medical Masks  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-reduce-virus-spread/?accordion=face-masks-coverings-for-the-general-public>
- Suppliers of Personal Protective Equipment  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-how-you-can-help/covid-19-become-a-supplier/>
- Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings:  
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>
- Screening for Symptoms
  - [Staff Screening Poster](#)
  - [Staff Screening Questionnaire](#)
- If You Have COVID-19 Symptoms:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-what-you-should-do/covid-19-have-symptoms-or-been-exposed/>
- How and When Get to Tested: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-what-you-should-do/covid-19-have-symptoms-or-been-exposed/?accordion=get-tested>

- When to Return to Work:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-what-you-should-do/covid-19-have-symptoms-or-been-exposed/?accordion=return-to-work>

## **Guidance for Specific Community and Workplace Settings**

- Celebrations, Holidays & Faith-Based Gatherings:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=celebrations-holidays-faith-based-gatherings>
- Child Care Centres:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=child-care-centres>
- Commercial or Residential Buildings:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=commercial-or-residential-buildings>
- Community Nonprofit Agencies:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=community-agencies>
- Community & Allotment Gardens:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=community-allotment-gardens>
- Day Camps:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=day-camps>
- Educational Institutions:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=educational-institutions>
- Elevators (Poster):  
<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/8eed-COVID-19-Social-Distancing-on-elevators-FINAL-WEB.pdf>
- Faith-Based Organizations:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=faith-based-organizations>
- Food Banks and Donation Centres:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/948e-COVID-19-Guidance-for-Food-Banks-and-Donation-Centres.pdf>



- Food Premises and Restaurants:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=food-premises>
- Funeral Homes & Cemeteries:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=funeral-homes-cemeteries>
- Group Homes & Congregate Settings:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=group-homes-congregate-settings>
- Harm Reduction Programs:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=harm-reduction-programs>
- Homelessness Services:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=homelessness-services>
- Laundry Rooms (Poster):  
<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/8d5f-Prevent-the-Spread-of-COVID-19-in-Shared-Laundry-Areas-Poster.pdf>
- Long-Term Care Homes:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=long-term-care-homes>
- Parks & Recreation Facilities:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=parks-recreation-facilities>
- Personal Service Settings:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=personal-service-settings>
- Public Transit:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=public-transit>
- Taxis & Ride Shares:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=taxis-ride-shares>

## Additional Occupational Health and Safety Resources

- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety COVID-19 Tip Sheets](#)
- [Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19](#)
- [Province of Ontario Guidance to Prevent COVID-19 in the Workplace](#)
- [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development: List of COVID-19 Guidance for Sectors:](#)
- [Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance: Essential Workplaces](#)
- [Infrastructure Health and Safety Association](#)
- [Workplace Safety and Prevention Services](#)
- [Post Pandemic Playbook](#)
- [COVID-19 Safety Tips and Posters](#)

## References

John Hopkins University (2020). *Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors*. Retrieved from; [https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs\\_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf](https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf)

Public Health Agency of Canada (2020). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Summary of assumptions*. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/assumptions.html#fn48>

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), 2020. *Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-informed-decision-making-workplaces-businesses-covid-19-pandemic.html>

Toronto Public Health (2020). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. Retrieved from: [https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/8d59-Fact-Sheet\\_Novel-Coronavirus.pdf](https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/8d59-Fact-Sheet_Novel-Coronavirus.pdf)

US Department of Labour (2020). *OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19*. Retrieved from: <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

World Health Organization (2020). *What does it mean to self-isolate?* Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

COVID-19 Risk Assessment and Risk Mitigation Planning

Use this tool to develop your own workplace risk assessment and risk mitigation plan.

Work Setting/ Service	Contact (H/M/L)		Risk Mitigation Potential (H/M/L)		Feasible Risk Mitigation Options	Resources Required	Information/ Training Required	Communicating to Staff and Customers	Prepare for Exposure or Outbreak
	#	Distance	Duration						