

The Health and Safety Excellence program: Helping businesses stay pandemic ready

How can businesses identify and address hazards in the workplace to control the spread of COVID-19?

Now more than ever before, businesses need a way to quickly identify and assess hazards in their workplace. There are a number of ways businesses can do this, such as:

- Document hazards present or likely to be present in the workplace
- Conduct routine workplace inspections to identify new or recurring hazards
- Investigate injuries, illnesses, incidents, and close calls/near misses to determine the underlying hazards, their causes, and safety and health program shortcomings.
- Review injury and illness reports to identify trends in injuries, illnesses, and hazards reported
- Consider the likelihood of hazards associated with emergency or non-routine situations, and
- Determine the severity and likelihood of incidents that could result for each hazard identified, and use this information to prioritize corrective actions.

The emergence of the COVID-19 has put a spotlight on the health and safety practices of businesses across the province, even for businesses that may have already put some, if not all of these initiatives in place before the pandemic.

Our Health and Safety Excellence program can help businesses identify and assess new workplace hazards with specific topics that support their health and safety efforts.

Our Recognition of Hazards topics allows businesses to understand the hazards present in their workplace, and how those hazards could result in injury or illness, which is known as a risk assessment.

Our Risk Assessment topic in our program helps businesses to identify existing and any new workplace hazards. The risk assessment process will allow firms to prioritize risks based on the nature of the hazards, and level of risk for each of the routine and non-routine operations and/or activities within their business.

In joining the Health and Safety Excellence program, businesses will receive pandemic readiness related tools and resources from an approved provider to develop policies and procedures to address the Ontario government's safety guidelines. These guidelines are sector specific, and will help employees, and customers better understand on how to reopen and stay open safely, and help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

How can businesses develop a work plan to address COVID-19, prevent spread, and resume their business operations safely?

Our Health and Safety Excellence program helps businesses reopen with confidence, limit the spread of COVID-19 and adjust to physical distancing restrictions. Suggested topics in our program that can help businesses adapt to new safety guidelines are the following: Emergency Response, Emergency Prevention and Preparedness and Control of Hazards.

Emergency response allows a business to establish, implement monitor and maintain procedure(s) to respond to emergencies

Emergency prevention and preparedness helps businesses address emergencies, which are hazardous situations that one should prevent and be prepared for. Your business will identify the types of emergency situations you may face and then develop and implement procedures to prevent the emergencies from happening.

Control of Hazard topic helps reorganize your workplace to remain safe and help control the spread of COVID-19, through the implementation of engineering controls (i.e. Plexiglass panels), administrative controls (i.e. staggering schedules), safe work practices (i.e. increased hygiene and sanitation measures), and PPE (i.e. wearing masks, gloves, and other protective gear).

In joining the Health and Safety Excellence program, you can receive COVID-19 related tools and resources from an approved provider to develop policies and procedures to address the Ontario government's safety guidelines so; we can prevent the spread of COVID-19.

How can businesses empower their staff and support employee mental health through the pandemic?

Investing in mental health awareness and prevention programs is not only the right thing to do; it has a positive impact on your business; especially now as we re-open the province. It also shows that you're aware of all the new challenges your staff are navigating through right now, such as sheltering in place during a pandemic, worrying about and taking care of loved ones, and the anxieties of going back to work during a pandemic. Investing in employee mental health and wellness can help your teams reach higher employee engagement and job satisfaction.

People want to feel safe and secure while they're at work, and employees will feel empowered in a workplace that puts their health and safety first. Businesses can achieve this with clear communications to staff, frequent updates on important health and safety issues and ensuring that an emergency communications plan is in place, that can be deployed quickly and with roles and responsibilities clearly identified.

The WSIB's Health and Safety Excellence program offers topics that can help businesses support employee mental health during the pandemic. Our Health and Safety Participation or Workplace Health Promotion topics help businesses create the programs they need to support employee mental health through the pandemic and build resilience by consulting, encouraging and supporting employees to participate in health and safety in the workplace and consistently checking in with employees, to get a pulse check on their mental and physical well-being.

When we foster a culture of health and safety, where all employees feel safe coming to work, employees feel empowered and more confident at work everyday.