

January 11, 2021

RE: Preventing COVID-19 in the workplace

To: Employers and Employees in Oxford County, Elgin County, and the City of St. Thomas

With the COVID-19 vaccine coming, there is light at the end of the tunnel, but we can't let our guard down yet. Community spread of COVID-19 is growing and we are seeing an increase in workplace transmission in our region.

As a result, I am issuing this letter to employers and employees of workplaces within Oxford County, Elgin-St. Thomas, to remind you we need your help to help flatten the curve during this critical phase of the pandemic. We are hopeful the **Provincewide Shutdown** that came into effect on Saturday, December 26, 2020 combined with our collective efforts will start to turn the tide on some very troubling local data.

What is happening in our community?

COVID-19 cases in our area are at the highest level to date. Based on prediction models, we have not reached the peak and we anticipate increasing cases throughout January. Last week we surpassed 400 active cases – a difficult milestone for our region.

Close contact between individuals in both work and social settings, who bring the virus home to their families, are contributing to the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. In particular, we have seen several outbreaks across various employment sectors (i.e. manufacturing/ factories, retail, office/administration, and transportation). This is due, in part, to employers and employees not adhering to COVID-19 preventative behaviours, including measures prescribed by Public Health, and the Ministries of Health and Labour.

What can you do to help?

Employers and employees of workplaces within Oxford County, Elgin-St. Thomas have a responsibility to understand and implement all of the local and provincial legislated requirements under the:

- [Occupational Health and Safety Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1 \(king.ca\)](#)
- Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020: Provincewide Shutdown: [O. Reg. 82/20](#)
- [Letter of Instruction to Businesses Regarding Mandatory Face Coverings](#)

We understand wading through all of this legislation can be daunting; Southwestern Public Health will support you through this. Here are a few key **protective requirements** your

workplace must follow:



Safety Plan

All businesses are required to have a written COVID-19 safety plan on-site and refer to it daily. A template for making a safety plan can be found at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/develop-your-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan>.



Self-Isolating

Workers with any symptom of COVID-19 should self-isolate, not attend work and seek COVID-19 testing. A list of COVID-19 symptoms can be found here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread#section-0>.



Remote Work

Enable remote work or alternating work hours for workers (e.g., flexible hours or staggered start times and break times), where reasonably possible.



Breaks

Provide employees with a safe space to take their breaks, allowing for physical distancing between employees when face coverings are removed for eating and drinking.



Face Coverings and Personal Protective Equipment

Face coverings are mandatory in the indoor area of a workplace. If the indoor space is **not** accessible to members of the public, each worker must wear a face covering, unless they can maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other worker.

*Reasonable exceptions are permitted for those who cannot tolerate face coverings.



Driving

Whenever possible, have only one individual per vehicle for work associated driving. If unavoidable, ensure face coverings (**preferably medical masks**) are supplied to and used by each worker or client. Also, increase the flow of fresh air through a partially open window.



Air Flow

Conduct, or have the property owner or landlord conduct a regular review of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in the workplace to ensure they are functioning and in good working order.



Outbreak Investigations

Workplaces must support all aspects of investigations and outbreak management related to communicable diseases, including COVID-19, conducted by Southwestern Public Health. For example, ensure adherence to public health isolation orders issued to employees.



Daily Screening

Workers must be actively screened for COVID-19 symptoms and risk factors at the beginning of each workday either verbally or using a written form that is reviewed. [COVID-19 Screening tool for Workplaces](#)

How can we help you?

In addition to the requirements listed above, we have developed a [Toolkit for Workplaces: Elgin County, Oxford County and the City of St. Thomas](#) (<https://www.swpublichealth.ca/workplacetoolkit>) with practical steps you can use to ensure your workplace operates safely to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

If you have questions, or need support, please do not hesitate to reach out to us or contact Ontario Ministry supports. We are committed to working with you to navigate the difficult months ahead.

Contacts for workplace support

Southwestern Public Health Website: www.swpublichealth.ca

Southwestern Public Health COVID-19 Call Centre: 1-800-922-0096 Ext. 9

Ontario's 'Stop the Spread Business Information Line': 1-888-444-3659

Ontario Ministry of Labour: www.labour.gov.on.ca

The collective efforts of employers and employees are required to protect our community. To ensure a wider re-opening of businesses and organizations following the current Provincewide Shutdown, and then to maintain their opening, will be dependent on keeping COVID-19 cases down in our region.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joyce Lock, MD, MSC, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health
Southwestern Public Health