

Role of Health and Safety Committees and Representatives During COVID-19



Resources:

[Energy Safety Canada's COVID-19 update page](#)

[Health & Safety Committees & Representatives \(HSCR\) online course](#)

[Government of Alberta OHS resource portal—COVID-19](#)

[BC's Restart Plan—What the New Normal Means for Employers and Public Institutions](#)

[Government of Saskatchewan—COVID-19 Information for Business and Workers](#)

Introduction:

Dealing with the workplace impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic can be challenging for employers. Health and Safety Committees (HSCs) and Representatives (HSRs) provide a system for workers and employers to identify workplace health and safety issues and find solutions. This includes health and safety concerns related to COVID-19.

Committee/Representative Responsibilities:

One of the key roles of HSCs and HSRs is to identify situations that may be unhealthy or unsafe for workers and provide advice. They are responsible for promptly responding to health and safety concerns and are expected to consult with and make recommendations to the employer and workers on improving occupational health and safety.

Relating specifically to COVID-19, HSCs and HSRs should:

- Collaborate with a health and safety professional to better understand health and safety prevention measures.
- Provide leadership around mental health awareness.
- Advise the employer on proposed changes to the workplace, including physical distancing, equipment or work processes that may affect the health or safety of workers. For example:
 - The use of machines or other equipment to assist with job tasks usually performed by two workers, such as lifting or carrying heavy objects, to maintain the physical distance of workers.
 - Installation of physical barriers where workers are in close proximity.
 - Postponing, re-arranging or planning work tasks so workers are not required to be in proximity to one another.
 - Ensuring the workplace and tools are regularly cleaned and disinfected.
- Post signage to remind workers to maintain distance when interacting.
- Communicate plans for when a worker suspects he/she may have COVID-19, for example:
 - Follow directions from public health authority.
 - If possible, sending workers home if they report feeling unwell.
 - Communicate acceptable working from home isolation programs.
 - Employer investigation for reporting a possible illness.
- Work with employer on re-opening plans.

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Employer Responsibilities:

- Joint committees must continue to meet regularly as per provincial Occupational Health and Safety Regulations. Ensure you understand your province's criteria for which operations require an HSC or HSR.
- Be familiar with public safety guidelines for COVID-19.
- Provide adequate hand-washing facilities that are visible and easily accessed and consider the use and location of alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Determine how to eliminate or minimize work processes that bring workers within 2 m of each other or members of the public. If it is not practicable to eliminate such work conditions, the encroachment on physical distancing should be kept as brief as possible by planning the task and providing instructions.
- Ensure your HSC or HSR is involved.
 - Communicate the mechanisms for workers to raise concerns about the risk of COVID-19 exposure.
 - Have committee members or representatives participate in a walk-through assessment of work processes to identify potential areas of increased risk and priority action.
 - Include the HSC or HSR in the development of control plans for different job tasks.
 - Ask the HSC or HSR to promote approved physical distancing measures.
 - Request feedback from the HSC or HSR on the effectiveness of control measures that are implemented.
 - Involve HSC or HSR in re-opening plans.
 - Communicate the programs in place for mental health awareness and provide a champion should issues arise.