

## Here's what to do if a worker shows COVID-19 symptoms

Your workplace has protocols in place for screening, disinfecting, physical distancing, hand washing, and more. You feel confident you've done everything you can to protect employees from COVID-19. But what if one of your employees shows symptoms of the virus at work, despite these efforts? You'll need to contain the situation quickly to avoid your worst nightmare — a COVID-19 outbreak.

Prepare now by putting an isolation protocol in place to deal with the possibility of a sick worker, says Julia Lok, a WSPS health and safety consultant for Central Ontario. Julia contributed an isolation protocol section to WSPS' [Post Pandemic Business Playbook](#), a free, interactive guide to COVID-19 preparedness and response.

"Putting a protocol in place doesn't have to be costly — even for smaller businesses — and it will ensure you are taking appropriate steps to reduce the risk of exposing other staff and customers to the virus," says Julia.

### Why we can't rely on screening tools alone

If screening and other measures are already in place, wouldn't employees with COVID-19 be identified before entering the workplace? Not necessarily, says Julia. "Screening tools are not perfect. Employees may self-screen incorrectly and onsite tools won't detect people with COVID-19 who are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic."

An isolation protocol can also help ensure employers follow practices recommended by public health authorities as well as the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, as part of an employer's duty to maintain a safe work environment. These practices appear in the [playbook](#).

### 4 key steps

When it comes to developing an isolation protocol for your workplace, consider these four key steps. You'll find more details in the [Post Pandemic Business Playbook](#), including an easy-to-use diagram on employee screening, isolation and returning to the workplace.

- 1. Assign an isolation coordinator.** "This could be a human resources person, or trained first aid worker, or in a smaller business, the owner or manager," says Julia. The coordinator is responsible for implementing the protocol.
- 2. Prepare an isolation room.** This room is ideally located outdoors; a lesser choice is inside the workplace in an enclosed area with good airflow, away from other workers. Keep hand sanitizers or other hand-washing amenities in the isolation area. Store a face mask, shield and other personal protective equipment (PPE) nearby.
- 3. Develop protocol steps.** These would cover topics such as

- communicating with the sick worker
- travelling to and from the isolation room
- practicing physical distancing/separation, proper hand-hygiene, and using personal protective equipment when required
- identifying any employees the ill worker may have had contact with
- decontaminating the areas and tools used by the ill worker
- contacting WSIB, Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, and if required in your municipality, public health authorities

**4. Determine next steps.** Follow the recommendations of public health authorities when it comes to an ill worker and others who may have been exposed.

*This article was prepared by Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS), helping Ontario businesses improve health and safety for over 100 years. For more COVID-19 related information, visit our COVID-19 hub <https://covid19.wsps.ca/> or contact WSPS at [customercare@wsps.ca](mailto:customercare@wsps.ca).*