

COVID-19 GENERAL WORKPLACE GUIDELINE (GWG)

Individuals (staff, faculty, students, contractors, visitors, etc.) are responsible for following health and safety measures where applicable. Individuals should report any health and safety concerns to their Principle Investigator (PI)/supervisor/manager/academic lead/UofT contact, etc., who will then promptly review, assess and implement measures to address the concern where appropriate. The unit/department head should continue to provide support to their faculty/librarian/staff as needed to address reported concerns. Contact EHS (ehs.office@utoronto.ca) if you require assistance.

Note: Individuals working in research affiliated institutes and/or hospitals must follow the host location's related policies and procedures.

1 MEASURES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION

Units should review within the context of their operations and apply where applicable and appropriate. For the most-up-to-date information, please refer to: [How U of T is promoting a safe environment | University of Toronto \(utoronto.ca\)](#), [UTogether](#), and the [EHS COVID-19 webpage](#).

MEASURES TO REDUCE RISK OF EXPOSURE

1. Individuals who are sick or who have COVID-19 related symptoms should stay home. Isolate until no fever and symptoms improving for 24 hours (48 hours for gastro-intestinal symptoms), regardless of testing results or no testing. Refer to: Ontario [COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#) and [Procedures in the Event of a Confirmed Case and/or COVID-19 Symptoms](#).
2. Avoid touching your face, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
3. Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
4. Practice proper respiratory etiquette, such as sneezing and coughing into your elbow.
5. Face masks are encouraged, and we ask everyone to always respect the decisions of others, their comfort levels, and health needs. Signage has been created to assist departments in communicating this message: [COVID-19 Face Mask: We Respect Your Choice](#).
6. Physical distancing is not required. Where appropriate and/or based on previous security and access control considerations, units may continue restricting building access (e.g., to fob/key only).

MASKS

Masks should be [well-fitted](#). For additional information, please refer to: [How to make your mask fit properly](#) on the Government of Canada website and [How to Knot and Tuck Your Mask to Improve Fit - YouTube](#) from the CDC (Centre for Disease Control). Departments may consider having a box of medical masks available as a contingency in the event someone arrives or becomes ill at the University. In these cases, individuals should be asked to reschedule or, where applicable, offered assistance to go home (e.g., taxi, contact family or friend) but a mask can be provided as they wait for transportation.

Masks and/or other PPE (personal protective equipment) may still be required in higher-risk settings (e.g., researchers working with COVID-19 positive patients or aerosol generating medical procedures). If you have any questions about masks, respirators, and PPE, please contact ehs.office@utoronto.ca

VENTILATION

Public health authorities and medical evidence continue to state that the risk of transmission is greatest when in close contact with an individual who is positive for COVID-19 ([TPH](#)). Transmission of COVID-19 by aerosols can occur over longer distances under favourable conditions (e.g., activities that increase generation of respiratory droplets and aerosols, overcrowding, poorly ventilated spaces). Transmission may also occur from touching a contaminated surface and then touching your eyes/nose/mouth. The University has implemented a [Tri-campus HVAC Strategy](#) as part of an overall ventilation strategy for [both](#) instructional and non-instructional spaces and

buildings. The University continually monitors public health guidance and emerging best practices to update our procedures and guidance.

In general building areas such as administrative offices, hallways, and meeting rooms, portable air filtration is not required. The University continues to encourage vaccinations, masking, staying home when sick, etc. If you have questions about your particular area, please contact EHS. Units should avoid purchasing portable air filtration units on their own unless they have consulted with EHS and their local facilities group.

In spaces that do not have mechanical ventilation, where possible, open windows and doors and continue to encourage users to follow public health recommendations: vaccination, mask use, using the provincial self-assessment tool, staying home when you are sick regular disinfection of shared surfaces and frequent hand hygiene. Note that many tasks at the University, such as general office activities or other administrative tasks confer a lower risk of transmission of COVID-19 compared to higher risk workplaces such as healthcare settings where aerosol-generating medical procedures take place for example.

Building ventilation systems would have complied with the applicable Ontario Building Code (OBC) standard during installation based on the building use. After installation, the University's team of trained licensed engineers operate and maintain the HVAC system so that it is working optimally to provide a safe indoor environment. Examples of regular maintenance are changing air filters at a frequency per manufacturer's instruction, visual inspections of the ventilation systems including their filters, multiple times per week, checking to ensure that the filters are sealed (i.e., no gaps), and checking pressure gauges. Current OBC references ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers) Standard 62.1 for ventilation and is applied where applicable and appropriate (e.g., renovation projects).

VENTILATION SHUTDOWNS

Local facilities groups planning for shutdowns should liaise with building occupants to discuss the impact/affected areas of ventilation shutdowns and develop a schedule to accommodate occupant usage of the affected spaces. For prolonged shutdown periods (e.g., more than 1 day's duration), please contact EHS for assistance if needed.

CARBON DIOXIDE AS AN INDICATOR OF AIR QUALITY

Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) can be found in the buildings where we live, work and shop, as it is part of the air we breathe out. Good ventilation will keep the concentrations of CO₂ and an array of contaminants low. Poor ventilation will allow them to accumulate.

Some organizations have recommended the use of CO₂ as an indicator of transmission risk for COVID-19. In Ontario, the 8-hr/40 hr per work week occupational exposure limit (known as the Time Weighted Average Exposure Value, TWAEV) is 5000 ppm (parts per million) for CO₂. The short-term exposure limit (STEL), for a 15-minute time weighted average exposure is 30,000 ppm. There are no regulated exposure limits for non-industrial workplaces such as offices or classrooms, but [some organizations apply standards in the range of 1000-1500 ppm](#), well below regulated exposure limits as guidance.

In a non-industrial workplace such as offices, humans are the main source of CO₂ from our exhalation. Indoor CO₂ levels may be used as an indicator of ventilation as part of a professional assessment. Although, a CO₂ level of 1000-1500 parts per million (ppm) is commonly seen as a signifier of poor indoor air quality (IAQ), *it should not be considered as a line between safe or unsafe conditions*. The standard of 1000 ppm is derived from body odour perception (i.e., what level of odours is acceptable to building occupants) and not modeled on disease transmission. The number of occupants, their age, weight and level of physical activity are all variables that directly [drive the amount of CO₂ indoors](#). The outdoor CO₂ levels and a building's size, location, and indoor temperature play important roles too. In addition, there are limitations to using CO₂ monitoring as an indicator of transmission risk because it does not account for filtration or the activities taking place within an indoor space. [For example, CO₂ levels are not affected by mitigation measures such as HVAC system filters](#) which can capture infectious aerosols.

The University's [Tri-campus COVID-19 HVAC Strategy](#) includes improved filtration and increased ventilation in our buildings and classrooms and aligns with local public health recommendation. There is no requirement to measure CO₂ levels for returning to in-person activities.

Individuals who have health and safety concerns should always report firstly to their supervisor or academic contact. EHS can be contacted for assistance (ehs.office@utoronto.ca). An individualized assessment can be provided on a case-by-case basis. A properly conducted IAQ survey is performed by trained professionals who are knowledgeable about exposure limits, IAQ standards and factors that impact the CO₂ levels (e.g., setting up equipment in appropriate locations to minimize interference with the sensors and to be representative of conditions in the space, understanding and interpreting data and observations, etc.). Only industrial hygiene instruments that are bump tested before each survey and are well-maintained (e.g., including an annual external calibration) should be utilized.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

The risk associated with transmission with shared objects is low and focus should be on regular hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette to reduce the risk of transmission. Regular disinfection of high touch points in common spaces (such as doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches, handrails, etc.) is in place. For more information, please refer to the [Caretaking Services webpage](#). Where applicable, units can provide individualized equipment to reduce sharing and have disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer available based on their operational needs.

PROVINCIAL SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Daily screening is not required but individuals are encouraged to monitor their health using the [Provincial health screening tool](#). Individuals who have symptoms should also complete the screening tool and follow instructions in the tool. We continue to ask members of our community to remain at home if they are ill.

For residential operations, residents are responsible for notifying the residents team if there is scheduled maintenance and repair in their unit and they become ill/need to isolate (refer to [Procedures in the Event of a Confirmed/Symptomatic Case or Known Exposure to COVID-19](#)). Work should be rescheduled where possible. For emergency repairs, the resident should be relocated to continue their isolation and workers should wear PPE (medical masks, gloves) and disinfect surfaces and tools after the work is completed.

It is also recommended that the screening questions be asked before entering the unit (i.e., residents could be self-isolating in their units). E.g.:

1. Are you experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or have tested positive and are self-isolating?
2. Are you currently monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms as a result of a close contact?
3. Have you been told that you should be quarantining, isolating, or staying at home? (e.g., by a doctor, federal border agent, public health)?

VACCINATION

COVID-19 vaccination is no longer required. The University continues to encourage vaccination of all UofT community members and visitors to be [primary series vaccinated](#) and to obtain booster shots (3rd, 4th, etc.), including individuals who have had COVID-19 in the past. For information: [COVID-19 and Flu Vaccine Clinics](#), [COVID-19: About the Vaccines – City of Toronto](#) and [About the COVID-19 vaccines - COVID-19 vaccine - Region of Peel \(peelregion.ca\)](#).

In some unique situations, COVID-19 vaccinations are required for higher risk-groups such as certain research contexts (e.g., working with a live strain of the virus). Proof of vaccination is managed by Occupational Health through the biosafety permitting process.

Vaccination status is private medical information and individuals should not be asked about their vaccination status unless there is a vaccine requirement related to their work or study (e.g., applicable clinical placements). In such cases, the individual will be referred to the appropriate medical/clinical resources at the University (e.g., Occupational Health) for this information.

STUDENT PLACEMENTS

Some programs have placements agreements with sites where vaccination is required (e.g., varicella, TB, rubella, COVID-19, etc.). In many cases, the onus is on the placement site to verify vaccination status. In others, existing agreements require verification to be done by the U of T division. In those cases where divisions are already verifying vaccination status, divisions should be utilizing the secure systems that they are already using to verify similar types of confidential student information that is required by law/regulation (e.g., police checks, other types of required vaccinations, TB screening, etc.).

As a reminder, guidance around vaccination verification for graduate students and post-docs in research settings in hospitals or third-party sites is available [online](#). As indicated in that guidance, there will likely be scenarios where students will be required to demonstrate proof of vaccination more than once. Where possible, the University of Toronto and its partners aim to incorporate the tracking of COVID-19 vaccination status into existing processes that monitor similar information. Any processes must be compliant with the established agreements.

For students in placement contexts requiring COVID-19 verification in Divisions that do not have established verification procedures/platforms:

- 1) If the University contractual/affiliation agreement with the placement site does not require us to provide verification, then the student will need to contact their placement site supervisor directly and provide them with any required documentation as per the site's requirements.
- 2) For Divisions that have a contract/agreement with a placement site that requires the University to validate vaccination status, the Divisional contact will send the list of student names to Bridgid McNulty, University Placements Coordinator, the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students (placements@utoronto.ca). The University Placement Coordinator will review/obtain archival data from the Ucheck archival data or the vaccination portal (if applicable) to verify their vaccination or collect new records based on the particulars of the case.

*Please note: For divisions that already have vaccination validation processes in place for non-COVID-19 vaccines (e.g., varicella, TB, rubella etc.), please continue to ensure that adequate notice of data collection information is provided to placement students in advance of vaccine validation.

RAPID ANTIGEN SCREENING

Rapid antigen screening or testing is not required for employees or students who were ill with COVID-19 (suspected or confirmed) for returning to campus once the isolation has been completed.

COMMUNICATIONS AND SIGNAGE

The only required signage at building entrances is the [COVID-19 Precaution/Symptoms Poster](#). Post signage at an accessible height to remind workers and inform students and visitors.

It is important to prepare faculty, staff, students, other space users, etc. for campus activities using accessible and plain language. The communication strategy may include memos, emails, meetings, orientation, signage, social media, etc. and should be distributed to applicable parties in advance (e.g., faculty, staff, students, visitors, contractors, clients, etc.). Communications may need to occur more than once, and updates should be provided where applicable.

Where applicable, ensure alternate formats of communication are made available. Please contact the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\) Office](#) or appropriate divisional HR office for more information.

TRAVEL

All students are able to travel internationally on University-sanctioned activities. Please note that travel will still not be allowed for undergraduate students for regions with [Global Affairs Canada travel advisories](#) of: “avoid non-essential travel” and “avoid all travel” as was the case pre-pandemic. If you are a graduate student that needs to travel to regions under those categories, for research or program completion purposes, please contact safety.aboard@utoronto.ca.

For all students travelling on University-sanctioned activity, you must complete all safety abroad pre-departure requirements including checking travel advisories, completing safety abroad online workshops, securing travel health insurance and completing the safety abroad registry. More information on the safety pre-departure requirements for university activity abroad is available on the [Safety Abroad website](#).

For individuals planning travel, they should familiarize themselves with the public health requirements of the destination country. For more information regarding travel, please refer to:

- Government of Canada websites: [Travel Advisories](#) and [COVID-19 Travel, testing and borders](#)
- UofT Safety Abroad Office (students): <https://safetyabroad.utoronto.ca/>
- [Off-Campus safety](#)

Field Trips should be approved per standard divisional level review requirements as applicable. The organizer is responsible for ensuring the business/location/site (as applicable) where the field trip is going is permitted to open and is in compliance with any specific requirements on it arising from COVID. The University is responsible for taking all reasonable precautions to protect workers and students. Field trips to any location and associated modes of transportation must be compliant with all applicable COVID-related regulatory or public health requirements. Units may also use the optional [Off-Campus Safety Planning Record \(Risk Assessment\)](#) to identify hazards and plan protective measures.

WORKSTATION ERGONOMICS AND REMOTE WORKSPACE SAFETY

Employees with approval to work from home may have questions about workstation ergonomics or other health and safety concerns when working at home or making changes to their workstation. Please visit the [EHS Office Ergonomics webpage](#) and the [EHS Office Ergonomics Infographics website](#). If you have a specific request such as taking office equipment home, please contact your supervisor. Supervisors/managers can contact HR for assistance.

Employees and faculty who have been approved to work from home (e.g. accommodation, approved alternate work arrangement) should review, the [Working Remotely](#) site, the [Working at Home Checklist](#) and Appendix B: Remote Workspace Safety Checklist in the [Alternative Work Arrangement Guideline](#).

2 PROCEDURES IN THE EVENT OF A CONFIRMED OR SYMPTOMATIC CASE OR KNOWN EXPOSURE

For detailed procedures, please refer to: [Procedures in the Event of a Confirmed/Symptomatic Case or Known Exposure to COVID-19](#). Clearance to return from Occupational Health (OH) is not required. If you have any questions, please contact the OH team (ehs.occhealth@utoronto.ca). Submission of an online accident/incident report for COVID-19 symptoms is not required unless requested by OH/EHS.

Public health paused contact tracing requirements in early 2022. If a department/unit has evidence of an established work related transmission source related to an employee (or multiple employees in their area) contracting COVID-19 at the workplace due to an increased risk greater than the risk to the general public,* please contact OHS, (ehs.occhealth@utoronto.ca).

*Examples of workplace settings where there is an increased risk include healthcare workers or first responders providing interventions to those with COVID-19.

3 ADDRESSING CONCERNS

Here are some considerations when addressing concerns:

1. **Keep communication channels open. Have regular check-in to see how everyone is doing. Encourage your reports to bring concerns forward.** Review institutional messaging about COVID-19: [UTogether](#) and [How U of T is promoting a safe environment](#). Ask for feedback and suggestions. Keep the safety talks positive.
2. **Model the desired behaviour and encourage control measures**, such as proper personal hygiene, etc. so that employees understand and meet your expectations.
3. **Be mindful of any stress that employees may be dealing outside of the University.** If they express specific worries, pay attention. Contact HR for assistance as required.
4. **Respond calmly and with assurance.** Listen carefully before speaking. If you do not know the answer regarding a COVID-19 related question/matter, attain the appropriate information first before responding to a concern.
5. **For any health and safety concerns brought to your attention, respond immediately.** Assessing a concern may take time; however, an immediate response to advise that you are reviewing their concern and will be in touch as soon as possible goes a long way to de-escalating worry and anxiety. If you need assistance in managing a concern, connect with your unit lead sooner rather than later to ensure you are provided with the support you require to effectively and expediently de-escalate concerns.
6. **Ask questions** such as “What part of the task concerns you? Do you have ideas on how to address the concern?” Communicate changes, in writing, to all affected parties. Ensure changes are in keeping with institutional messaging – refer to [How U of T is promoting a safe environment](#). Contact your Divisional HR Office (employees) and EHS for assistance.
7. **Be flexible** and be prepared to accommodate individual needs. One single approach will not work for all as there are differing needs among employees.

4 EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

Below is a list of resources to assist departments:

- Embedding equity, diversity and inclusion when developing training modules for employees on the department/division’s procedures. Individuals with accommodation plans, and family caregiving obligations, may be impacted in their return to the workplace. The following resources provide guidance as it pertains to the appropriate offices to reach out to, and resources that can be used:
 - [Equity Offices](#)
 - [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities \(AODA\) Office](#)
 - [Inclusion, Accessibility and Accommodation](#)
 - [Health and Well-Being Programs and Services](#)
 - [Family Care Office](#)
- For students requiring accommodation, please contact the [Office of the VP-Provost Students](#) for assistance. For employee mental health issues, please contact your [HR Divisional Office](#). Units may consider having a designated person receive and collate all queries to ensure consistent, clear messaging and follow-up.
- Rumours and misinformation can circulate rapidly amongst the community and widely via social media. For more information, please review the document entitled [Social Stigma associated with COVID-19](#) from UNICEF. Contact your divisional HR office if you need assistance or [Equity offices](#) for support and assistance. For more information regarding human rights, please refer to the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) website.

5 Research Space and Activities Considerations

The same general precautions listed above apply to research environments. In addition, if you are conducting research on an off-campus location, please visit [EHS Off-Campus Safety](#) for resources and information. In addition, the following considerations should be reviewed:

- 1) **Masks and other PPE** may be required for certain research activities where there is an elevated risk of COVID-19 exposure (e.g., researchers working with the COVID-19 virus or COVID-19 positive patients) Please also speak to your supervisor/PI regarding health and safety precautions, including PPE. EHS can also be contacted for assistance: ehs.office@utoronto.ca. **Note:** When wearing a mask/ respirator while working with hazardous material (e.g., biological agents, flammable chemicals, radioactive agents), please speak to your supervisor/Principle Investigator on the safe use of masks.
- 2) **COVID-19 Research Training:** All personnel working with SARS-CoV-2, including its RNA and DNA, must review the SARS –CoV-2 Biosafety Guideline available [here](#) and take the online EHS 620 – SARS-CoV-2 Biosafety Training course (go to [My EHS Training](#)).
- 3) **Emergency Plan:** Researchers should have plans in place that includes emergency contact information, identifying equipment/facilities/experiments that require special attention, written documentation in place detailing ongoing experiments and associated safe operating procedures (SOPs), winding down/scaling up of activities and any other applicable scenarios. Research staff should be trained/instructed on these procedures and how to access them in an emergency.

6 In-Person Instruction (including Teaching Labs)

All members of the UofT community are recommended to follow the general strategies detailed above. Under the University of Toronto's [Tri-campus HVAC Strategy](#), classroom-specific measures were also implemented which includes assessing classroom ventilation, setting an internal target of 6 equivalent Air Changes per Hour (ACHs) and where appropriate, enhancing ventilation with centrally installed and maintained air purification units. Safety orientation for each practical session should include COVID-19 reminders and infection prevention, control procedures and reporting of non-compliance. There are regular filter checks for air purifiers that have been centrally installed in classrooms. For more information, please refer to: [COVID-19 Air Purifier Filters in Classrooms](#). Instructors can also refer to the following documents for additional information:

- o [COVID-19/Respiratory Illness In-Class Instruction Guidelines for Course Instructors](#)
- o [COVID-19/Respiratory Illness In-Class Instructional Guidelines for Course Instructors – First Class or Tutorial Slide Deck](#)

7 Events

Departments are expected to plan events with local facilities management or property management groups to mitigate potential issues with congestion in common spaces. For any University activities occurring off-campus at a third-party venue (i.e., non-University owned or leased spaces), please follow the 3rd party venue requirements for the event. All parties should be familiar with the [Procedures in the Event of a Confirmed/Symptomatic Case or Known Exposure to COVID-19](#).

The risk of transmission will vary depending on the activities that take place. In addition to the general precautions above, here are some additional considerations when planning the event:

- Hold outdoor events.
- Hybrid or online options for those who wish to attend virtually.
- Reduce sharing by providing individualized / dedicated equipment, packaged foods, utensils, etc. and have a plan on how they will be distributed (see below regarding queuing).
- Have a plan for queuing to manage overflow traffic (e.g., signage, overflow space, person to direct guests, etc.)
- Communicate reminders/expectations (e.g., stay home if you're sick, recommend the [Provincial health screening tool](#), etc.)
- Provide face masks (optional), hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes as applicable and appropriate.

Additional considerations for **potlucks and homemade foods** are provided on the Food Services website:
<https://foodservices.utoronto.ca/potlucks/>.