Screening for COVID-19

Introduction

This tip sheet will help employers and workers understand how screening can be used to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace.

COVID-19 is a disease that can easily spread and cause illness or death. Multiple public health measures and workplace controls should be implemented in a layered approach to prevent the spread.

Screening is one of the controls which can help reduce the likelihood of the virus entering and spreading in the workplace.

Screening methods can help identify people who are:

- Symptomatic: showing symptoms and possibly infected with COVID-19.
- Asymptomatic: not showing symptoms but carrying the virus and can infect others.
- Pre-symptomatic: infected with COVID-19 but not yet showing symptoms.

Screening can be placed into two major categories:

- Active screening
- Passive screening

Follow screening requirements from your local public health authority, as applicable.

Refer to COVID-19 testing, screening and contact tracing from the Government of Canada for more information on screening.

Active Screening

Active screening occurs when information is gathered from individuals to determine if they might have COVID-19. Note: this is not a clinical assessment or medical advice.

All individuals (including visitors) should be screened before entering the workplace. Screening can also be useful before allowing work to be done at customer locations. Workers who live on-site (e.g., congregate housing, work camps, dorms) should be screened before starting their shift.

Several tools may be used to gather the required evidence:

- **Questionnaires:** An individual answers screening questions in paper or electronic formats. You may use a screening template from the CCOHS, your local public health authority or jurisdiction, or create your own.

- **Verbal screening:** A designated person asks the individual a series of screening questions and may also record their answers on a questionnaire form. Both individuals should follow protective measures such as mask wearing, hand hygiene, physical distancing, and separation by a physical barrier.

- **Observation:** The screener observes individuals for obvious COVID-19 symptoms. While in the working environment, workers should also be attentive for anyone displaying signs of illness.

- **Temperature check:** A contactless device which is designed to measure a person's body temperature may be used in addition to screening questions. An elevated temperature (38 degrees Celsius or higher) indicates a fever and potential COVID-19 infection. Note that some individuals may have COVID-19 without experiencing a fever.

- **Testing:** A test is conducted on an individual's sample (such as a nasal swab). Test results are generally more reliable than other screening tools. There are multiple options for testing:

  - Rapid testing: Tests are done with kits and the results can be obtained within minutes. Positive test results can identify people who are asymptomatic. Some people with COVID-19 can receive negative results (a false negative).

  - Laboratory testing: Test results are more accurate than rapid testing, but samples must be taken to an accredited laboratory for processing. Due to the slow return of results (which can take days) and the

high cost of these type of tests, they are rarely used as a routine workplace screening method. A polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is a type of laboratory testing.

Passive Screening

All individuals should self-monitor and self-report potential COVID-19 illness or exposure to the virus. Passive screening should be continuous while in the workplace but is also important before entering the premises and beginning work.

Passive screening information can be communicated using:

- Signs posted where they can be easily seen, such as at entrances or notice boards.

- Workplace communication platforms (e.g., e-mails, company intranet, etc.).

- Training.

It should include:

- The symptoms of COVID-19.

- How and when to self-report.

Screening Questions

Screening questions are used to identify potential COVID-19 illness or exposure situations. The questions asked may change over time along with the pandemic situation. Use questions that are appropriate to your jurisdiction and setting.

Suggested questions include:

- Have you recently tested positive for COVID-19?

- Are you experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19?

- Have you been recently exposed to anyone who is confirmed to be COVID-19 positive?

- Have you been recently instructed to isolate or quarantine by public health authorities or due to travel?

- Are you fully vaccinated against COVID-19?

Screening questionnaires may be used in verbal, paper, or electronic formats.

Symptoms of COVID-19

Symptoms may appear within 1 to 14 days from the date of exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. People with COVID-19 may experience all, some, or no symptoms.

Common symptoms include:

- New or worsening cough.

- Sore throat.

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.

- Body temperature of 38°C or higher (fever).

- Fatigue or weakness.

- Muscle or body aches.

- New loss of smell or taste.

- Headache.

- Runny nose.

- Sneezing.

- Gastrointestinal symptoms (abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting).

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- Feeling very unwell.

- Skin changes or rashes.

How to Screen Workers, Customers, and Others

Any combination of screening tools suitable to your workplace may be used. A risk assessment can help in choosing the most effective and practical screening methods. For example, most organizations would not find PCR tests to be suitable but can effectively implement active or passive screening, as needed.

Customers or clients could be asked applicable screening questions when they are booking their appointments, and again at reception upon arrival at the premises. They could also be asked to read a checklist and confirm that they meet the criteria (such as not having any symptoms, etc.) to enter or be served.

When Someone Passes the Screening

If the individual passes the screening process, allow them to enter the premises or access your goods and services. Your jurisdiction may also require that you record everyone's:

- Name.

- Contact information (e.g., phone number or e-mail address).

- Time spent on the site.

Information gathered might be requested by your local public health authority for the purpose of contact tracing. All personal information must be safely stored and destroyed as required by privacy laws.

When Someone Does Not Pass Screening

Anyone failing any part of the screening process should not be allowed to enter the premises.

Passive screening by individuals who are already in the workplace can result in a suspected positive case at any time. If this happens, the individual must be treated as if COVID-19 positive.

Follow the guidance of your COVID-19 response plan and local public health authority to respond accordingly.

Call **911** for medical assistance if anyone experiences severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing, chest pain or pressure, confusion, discolouration of skin, lips or nails, or loss of consciousness. Notify their emergency contact if the person is a worker.

Investigate all confirmed workplace COVID-19 infections. Refer to guidance from your health and safety regulator and worker compensation board to determine legal reporting requirements.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a Crisis Centre in your area.

It is important that mental health resources and support are provided to all workers, including access to an employee assistance program, if available.

For further information on COVID-19, refer to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.

Disclaimer: As public and occupational health and safety information is changing rapidly, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.

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