Preparing for the Potential Spread of COVID-19

With several countries reporting that COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) is spreading within the general population, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, has noted that the global risk related to the virus is evolving. While the risk in Canada remains low, it makes sense to become prepared in case there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in Ontario.

Ensure your workplace is prepared:

- **Make preparations within your workplace.**
  - Create back up plans in the event of prolonged staff absences.
  - Prepare for 5-10% of your staff to be absent from work in the event of a local outbreak.
  - Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies, as workers may need to stay home when they are sick, to care for a sick household member, or care for their children in the event of school dismissals.
  - Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff (similar to planning for holiday staffing).
  - Reinforce infection control procedures.
- **Avoid large meetings or events.**
  - If recommended by public health officials, avoid non-essential, and postpone workplace, community, and social events with potential of exposure to a large volume of people.

Develop a contingency plan:

- **Identify clear roles and responsibilities:**
  - Identify a co-ordinator or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning.
  - Work with staff to ensure an understanding of roles and responsibilities within your organization.
- **Develop plans for providing services with reduced numbers of staff.**

Know the risks – share and access up-to-date information:

- **Update your emergency communication plan for distributing timely and accurate information.**
  - Identify everyone in your chain of communication (for example, workers, customers, suppliers, and key community partners and stakeholders) and establish systems for sharing information with them.
  - Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the chain of communication.
  - Identify appropriate mechanisms to send information to those inside and outside your workplace.
  - Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating information to workers and customers.

- **Get your information about COVID-19 from reputable sources.**
  - The [Ontario Ministry of Health](#), [the Public Health Agency of Canada](#), and [Hastings Prince Edward Public Health](#) all have web pages dedicated to providing current, accurate information and reccomendations about COVID-19.

Maintain infection control procedures:

- **Separate those who become sick at your workplace from those who are well.**
  - Send sick workers home immediately. If someone at risk for COVID-19 becomes sick at your workplace, separate them from others as soon as possible.

- **Limit the spread of germs and take care of your employees.**
  - Encourage staff to wash their hands frequently using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

    Remind staff to cough and sneeze into the bend of their arm, not into their hands.
  - If you use a tissue, throw it away immediately and wash your hands.
  - Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes with your hands.
  - Avoid shaking hands with others, use other forms of acknowledgement.

hpePublicHealth.ca

- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that a lot of people touch (door handles, phones, light switches, desks), and wash your hands after touching these surfaces.
- Avoid sharing items with others such as utensils, water bottles, foodGet plenty of rest, eat healthy, and stay physically active to keep your immune system strong.
- Get your influenza vaccine to help prevent getting the flu.
- Stay home when you are sick and avoid contact with other people until your symptoms are gone.
- If you suspect you are sick, avoid visiting people in long term care, or individuals with health concerns.

Source: U.S. Centre for Disease Control. https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/pdf/gr-pan-flu-work-set.pdf

Other questions?

Call HPEPH at 613-966-5500 | Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY: Dial 711 | hpePublicHealth.ca

hpePublicHealth.ca