



# SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS FOR NGO OPERATIONS

## Background

In the midst of the COVID19 pandemic, NGO Alliance of Ontario organizations will need to continue to respond to the needs of communities impacted by overland flood, wildfire, tornado, etc... The current pandemic increases risk exposure during response to NGO personnel, volunteers, clients and the public. While each respective mission remains the same for these organizations, the methods by which this mission is achieved will necessarily need to adapt to meet this new risk landscape.

## Objective

The objective of this document is to compile current NGO Alliance of Ontario organization best practices to increase safe workspaces to ensure staff, volunteers, clients and the public are protected as much as possible while NGOs deliver services. While it is understood that each NGO will engage their own duty of care planning teams to evaluate and mitigate individual risks, this document is intended to help provide a framework for those evaluations.

## Considerations

### General Considerations

- Risk management is a real-time discipline and, as such, it is critical to create a feedback loop from frontline to management staff so that safety issues can be addressed quickly
- Ensure frontline workers are aware that they have the right to refuse unsafe work at any time
- It is helpful to assign a health and safety lead for every team/task
- Anticipate that increased health and safety practices with regard to COVID19 will lower overall productivity, leadership must adjust expectations accordingly

### Volunteer/Staff Recruitment and Activation

- Ensure volunteers and staff are made aware of the increased risk of volunteering and are allowed to provide 'informed consent' before they accept a new assignment
- Utilize health screening tools such as Ontario's Self-assessment Tool before deploying personnel <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>
- Consider increased online training strategies to ensure personnel understand new risks and procedures before they arrive on site
- Prioritize local volunteers/staff to limit risk exposure related to domestic air-travel
- Be conscious of personnel at 'high-risk' to COVID19 (i.e. those over 60, those with compromised immune systems, etc...)
- Document start and end of shift health screening – temperature check

## Volunteer/Staff Travel Logistics

- Where possible select transportation options that limit exposure risk (driving vs. flying)
- Organizational/shared vehicles should be equipped with sanitizer and drivers instructed to sanitize surfaces upon each entrance into the vehicle
- Where possible, limit number of individuals in each vehicle, possibly encouraging use of personal vehicles where practical, some organizations are limiting vehicles to two occupants, one in front and one in back.
- Utilize procedural masks to catch any cough/sneeze inside vehicle

## Interactions with Clients/Public

- Maintain distance of 2m whenever dealing with clients/public
- Request clients call ahead or schedule by appointment
- To the extent possible, limit interactions with clients/public, this may mean interacting with clients outside of organizational facilities (i.e. pop-up tent outdoors, while client is in their vehicle)
- Provide procedural masks to clients for personnel safety
- For tasks that require personnel to enter homes, call ahead and inquire if there are symptomatic or at-risk occupants to the home. > 60 years old, underlying health issues (cardiac, pulmonary, diabetes, cancer) and immune-suppressed individuals
- Sanitize items that may be shared between personnel and clients (pens, clipboards, carts, etc...)

## Food Handling

- Safe food handling should be practiced at all times.
  - Washing hands before and after handling food and food packaging is standard practice in food premises and should be strictly enforced at food banks and food distribution hubs
  - Staff and volunteers should avoid touching eyes, nose and face, and should remind each other if they see co-workers touching their own faces
  - If using disposable gloves for any tasks, handwashing is still important and should be done before putting on and after removing the gloves. If using gloves, change often, especially if soiled, ripped or become dirty.
- Refer to hand-washing and hand sanitizing guidance here:  
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-covid-19-hand-hygiene.pdf?la=en>
- Limit number of people permitted in any food handling areas
- Sanitize food as necessary, wash hands frequently
- Avoid shared or 'family-style' meal serving, food served to personnel or public should be single-serving
- Sanitize all commonly touched surfaces

## Volunteer/Staff Housing Logistics

- Document health screening of all deployed personnel on a daily basis (before and after shift)
- House volunteers in the lowest possible density to establish physical distancing (ideally independent rooms/buildings)
- Ensure there are enough supplies on hand for proper hand hygiene, including soap, warm running water and paper towels or hot air dryers.

- Establish regular sanitization plan for any shared spaces, especially high-touch surfaces like door knobs, computers, keyboards, computer mice, headsets, telephones, light switches, railings, tables, chairs, vehicles, equipment, and tools
- Any shared office/eating space should also follow an established sanitization schedule
- No-touch garbage cans are preferred for disposal of items.
- Post signs in conspicuous locations reminding personnel to wash hands and practice physical-distancing
- Where personnel may be eating together, consider physically spacing chairs and tables to promote 2m distancing

### Personal Protective Equipment

- Evaluate procedures to determine appropriate PPE procedures for each task, enough to maintain safety but not too much to create shortage
- Ensure personnel are aware of proper donning/doffing procedures as improper use of PPE can increase personal risk
- Have an established procedure and reporting system for PPE breaches

### Mental and Emotional Considerations

- Working in a COVID19 risk environment elevates emotional and mental strain, so consider what provisions could be made for personnel to alleviate increased stress
- Ensure families of deployed personnel are informed of and support increased risk to their family member while serving

### Reporting

- Organizations should have a reporting mechanism to identify health and safety breaches as well as near misses.
- Establish possible exposure reporting process and consequence plan
- Detailed daily tracking of movements. In the event of a positive, the organization will need to help Ontario's Ministry of Health & Long Term Care track backwards for containment.



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