

12 COVID-19 best practices from the warehousing industry

How effective are the controls you have in place to manage COVID-19? Are there even better ways to ensure the health and safety of your employees? As Ontario heads back to work, it's a good time to find out, says WSPS Senior Consultant Norm Kramer.

Drawing on a recent WSPS webinar, "How Warehouses are Overcoming COVID-19 Challenges: Sharing Best Practices and Solutions," Norm has listed below 12 practices implemented by leading Ontario warehouse and distribution centres — essential industries that have been operating at full capacity throughout the pandemic.

"Workplaces are facing challenges that few have encountered before, and many are responding with practical, creative solutions. The following practices, which could be applied to any workplace, may either confirm you are doing the right thing, or give you ideas you hadn't thought of for keeping staff safe during COVID-19," says Norm.

Minimize contact among employees

1. Have the same group of employees work the same shifts to minimize their contact with others. Stagger shift and break times to reduce congestion in the cafeteria and at entrances and exits.
2. Allow office staff to work at home, reduce the number of visitors, and minimize or use the same temporary workers. If using temps, include them in daily COVID-19 health screenings.
3. Eliminate in-person meetings; use video or phone, or hold meeting outdoors to ensure physical distance.

Minimize contact with visitors and customers

4. Use contactless delivery. For example, have delivery drivers leave item at the doorstep and handle transactions electronically. Have drivers that enter your facility remain in their cab following live load/unload procedures.
5. If visitors must come inside, install barriers to protect staff from droplets and block access to the rest of workplace.
6. If possible, install separate comfort stations for visitors.

Ensure physical distancing

7. Rearrange workstations to provide greater distance between employees. One facility has shut down every other Pack station to permit more space between workers (in this case, 3 metres). Another has removed gravity conveyors to create more space.
8. In the cafeteria, remove some tables and place the rest two metres apart, or convert other sections of the workplace into seating areas. "One distribution centre I spoke with has created three cafeterias, but points out it's important to guard the perimeters to protect workers from mobile equipment," says Norm.
9. Protect mobile equipment operators and pedestrians from contact with others by implementing one-way traffic only.

10. Install coat dividers, or better yet provide personal lockers in change rooms so their clothing is not in contact with others.
11. Give employees a wearable device that provides a warning, such as vibration, if another worker gets too close, and can track whom the wearer has contact with.

Screening

12. Consider using a gateway scanner at the entrance, which can take the temperature of 20 or more people per minute. Alternatively, use infrared thermometers to quickly scan foreheads, or have employees take their own temperature before they come to work.

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.