

# **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

**Policy Type: Health and Safety**

**Subsection: Twelve, Infection Control**

---

**Policy Title: Communicable Illness Infection Control**

**Policy Number: HS 12.1**

---

**Policy Approved By: Northumberland County Council Resolution # 2020-07-22-227**

**Effective Date: July 22, 2020**

**Reviewed: February 2024**

**Revised: December 2023; Supersedes Infection Control Pandemic H1N1 2009, March 14, 2024**

**Applicable To: All County Employees**

---

If you require this information in an alternate format, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator at 1-800-354-7050 ext. 2327.

---

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Corporation of the County of Northumberland (County) is committed to maintaining a safe, secure and clean working environment for all workers and visitors to our workplaces. This commitment is in accordance with the Corporate Health and Safety Policy HS 1.2. The County believes that all services provided are of extreme importance, however, no job is so urgent that time and care cannot be taken to conduct work safely. As the employer, the County is obligated under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of all workers' health and safety, including protection from spread of infectious illnesses. Similarly, workers are obligated under the County's Health and Safety Policy HS 1.4 to take reasonable measures to protect themselves and their co-workers.

The County will demonstrate its commitment by providing financial, physical and human resources for the development, implementation and maintenance of a sustainable Infection Control Program risk factors are recognized and effectively controlled.

This policy and program are components of Corporate Health and Safety Management Plan, Section 12.

## **OBJECTIVE(S)**

The purpose of this procedure is to control the spread of Communicable Illnesses and to protect workers from contracting these illnesses (e.g., H1N1, Novel Corona Viruses such as COVID-19). The County is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all its workers as well as visitors of the workplace.

# POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL

---

## AUTHORITY

Implementation and authority of this Policy shall follow the Internal Responsibility System within the County whereby all workers, supervisors, managers, directors, and County Council have a responsibility for a safe work environment complying with the following legislation:

- Occupational Health and Safety Act:
  - a) Section regarding duties of employers e.g. 25(2)(a) provide information and instruction to a worker; 25(2)(h): general duty of care: to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker;
  - b) Section 25(2)(d) acquaint a worker or a person in authority over a worker with any hazard in the work
  - c) Section 27 regarding Duties of supervisor, e.g. 27(2), (a) advise a worker of the existence of any potential or actual danger to the health or safety of the worker of which the supervisor is aware; (b) where so prescribed, provide a worker with written instructions as to the measures and procedures to be taken for protection of the worker; and (c) take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker.
  - d) Section 28 regarding duties of workers e.g. 28(1) (a) work in compliance; 28(1) (d) report the existence of any hazard which he or she knows.
  - e) Section 51 and 52 regarding notification to the Ministry of Labor, Immigration, Training and Skills Development of death, injury, or illness.
- Workplace Safety and Insurance Act.
- Northumberland County Corporate Health and Safety Policy HS 1.2
- Northumberland County Health and Safety Policy 5.3 Employee Injury/Incident Reporting
- Northumberland County Health and Safety Policy 6.1 Return to Work After Absence Due to Medical Reasons and Temporary Modified Work

Employers and supervisors are required to inform all workers about hazards of Communicable Illnesses on the job and provide training to workers on how to prevent these hazards and protect themselves from harm. Workers are also required to follow policies and procedures set out by the employer and to notify supervisors of exposure to Communicable Illnesses on the job.

## DEFINITIONS

**Communicable Illnesses** is defined as an illness resulting from infectious agents such as viruses, bacteria, and fungi. The transmission of these agents can be direct or indirect and varies based on the specific agent. Common transmission routes include person-to-person contact, animal-to-person interactions, ingesting contaminated food or

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

water, contact with contaminated surfaces or objects, and exposure to infected soil or environmental sources.

### **The COVID-19 Virus**

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, difficulty breathing and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. According to the most current scientific information, most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. The increased risk of developing serious COVID-19 complications is of added concern for individuals who are over the age of 65 or who have pre-existing medical conditions.

A viral pandemic such as COVID-19 is different than the seasonal flu. It is a new strain that can spread quickly among people because they have no pre-existing immunity against it.

### **Respiratory Virus Symptoms:**

- sudden fever of 38° C (100.4°F) or higher
- headache
- dry cough
- muscle aches especially in the lower back and legs
- extreme weakness and exhaustion

### **Other symptoms can include:**

- chills
- loss of appetite
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose

## **SCOPE**

This policy applies to all current workers including contractors and volunteers in all operations of the County connected to work, including off-site meetings, training and day to day operations. The safety expectations outlined in this policy follow health authority recommendations for the reduction of illness spread and apply to all persons including members of the public when conducting business at County facilities or properties.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **General**

- 1) All workers, contractors and volunteers are required to follow the procedures set out in this policy to reduce the risk of exposure to Communicable Illnesses.

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

- 2) This policy will be used in association with Human Resource Policies 4.1.2 Attendance Support Program, 4.19.3 Short Term Disability Plan, and Health and Safety 5.3 Employee Injury/Incident Reporting.
- 3) Emergency Planning begins with the individual. All workers should have enough supplies at home to self-isolate for a minimum of 72 hours while recovering from symptoms of a Communicable Illnesses.

### **Health Monitoring Matrix**

- 1) Symptoms of concern not related to influenza and corona viruses:
  - a. Self-monitor for worsening symptoms
  - b. Follow most current Staff Screening Tool
  - c. Self-isolate as per County Short Term Disability Policy or Collective Agreement; contact family physician and Occ Health Service
  - d. If able go about their day and avoid crowded places and increase personal space to above 2 meters from others
  - e. Workers are expected to report to their manager and follow the above protocol. Workers may have ability to work from home.
- 2) Symptoms of concern related to influenza and corona viruses:
  - a. Self-monitor self for worsening symptoms
  - b. Follow most current Staff Screening Tool / Health Authority Screening Tool
  - c. Must follow Occ Health Service direction
  - d. Must follow direction in consultation with Health Authority to be tested
  - e. Must follow directive on most current isolation protocol while waiting for test results
  - f. Workers are expected to report to their manager and follow the above protocol. Workers may have ability to work from home.
- 3) Directives of the Health Authority
  - a. Workers must follow directives of the Health Authority on the most current isolation and testing protocol.
- 4) Northumberland County will maintain records of reports of exposure.

### **Employer (Director, Senior Management)**

The County shall:

- 1) be responsible to ensure proper application of the Communicable Illness Infection Control Policy.
- 2) ensure senior staff will comply with the Continuity of Operations plan for the purposes of providing critical levels of operation. Departments such as the Golden Plough Lodge (GPL) and Northumberland Paramedics (Paramedics) will

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

continue to review the most current department-specific Communicable Illnesses control protocols to ensure that personal protective equipment is in place in the event that it is needed.

- 3) remind workers that protecting themselves and others by preventative measures is the single best way to prevent the spread of a Communicable Illness.
- 4) take measures to ensure that appropriate physical distancing processes are in place to prevent the spread of Communicable Illnesses.
- 5) take measures to ensure that cleaning staff are thoroughly disinfecting items such as doorknobs, handles, and boardroom furniture.
- 6) in situations where a Communicable Illnesses has been defined as posing a serious danger to the public requiring additional protective measures, shall follow the mandates provided by the local Public Health Authority as directed by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health. Actions may include implementing measures such as:
  - a. restricting access to County facilities to essential workers only;
  - b. implementing alternative work arrangements for workers when possible, such as working from home and/ or rotating shifts;
  - c. adjusting service provision to online and telephone delivery methods, replacement of cash transactions for services with electronic payment methods; and
  - d. assigning workers to individual workstations, vehicles, and equipment for the duration of the scheduled shift.

### **Supervisors**

All supervisors shall:

- 1) be responsible for documentation and implementation of preventive infection control programs and processes as directed by the County.
- 2) maintain records of all absenteeism and report on absenteeism as required.
- 3) follow the Health Monitoring Matrix to assist symptomatic workers:
  - a. in accordance with OHS Act Section 25(2)(h) “*The Employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of the worker*”;
  - and
  - b. ask the ill worker how they feel.

### **Workers (General/Non- Paramedics/GPL)**

All workers shall:

- 1) notify their supervisor immediately that they are feeling ill and are unable to perform work.
- 2) follow the Health Monitoring Matrix.

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

- 3) if diagnosed with a Communicable Illness, follow their physician's instructions.
- 4) to prevent exposure to a Communicable Illnesses, avoid close contact with anyone who is ill. If ill, keep their distance from others to protect others from becoming ill. Practice social distancing. Maintain at minimum a 2 meter (6 foot) distance from people. Attempt to use email, Internet, and phone instead of personal attendance at meetings.
- 5) cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and throw the tissue away immediately. Afterwards, clean their hands.
- 6) wash their hands often to help protect against becoming ill. Wash with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds.
- 7) when soap and water are not available, use an 60% alcohol-based disposable wipe or gel sanitizer.
- 8) avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. Chances of becoming ill are increased by touching a surface contaminated with the virus, and then touching the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- 9) practice good health habits by getting plenty of sleep, maintaining physical activity, managing stress, drinking plenty of fluids, eating nutritious foods, and avoiding smoking.
- 10)if experiencing symptoms of a fever or cough, limit contact with people to prevent spread of illness to others. See a physician if symptoms become worse.
- 11)stay informed to protect themselves and other people.

### **Paramedics and GPL Workers**

All workers within the Paramedics department or at the GPL shall:

- 1) follow infection control procedures as implemented in their respective departmental infection control program.
- 2) if exposed to patients showing symptoms of a Communicable Illness, report the exposure to their supervisor and document the exposure as outlined under "Exposure Reporting" of this Policy.

### **Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) / Joint Health and Safety Representative (JHSR)**

All JHSCs and JHSRs shall:

- 1) assist in identifying and reporting unsafe work conditions caused by infection hazards.
- 2) investigate any reports of unsafe work conditions and participate to resolve the concern. This includes documenting and reviewing reports of exposure to infection hazards.

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

- 3) be involved in the workplace assessment - promoting awareness of infection hazards by monitoring compliance during monthly inspections and advocating safe work practices.
- 4) assist in revising and updating this policy as circumstances require.
- 5) help communicate this Policy's purpose to workers and demonstrate leadership.
- 6) participate, contribute, and enforce this policy; namely infection hazards recognition, assessment, control/prevention, control evaluation, and injury reporting.
- 7) assist the County in developing a process for identifying workplace infection issues.
- 8) when necessary, make recommendations in writing to Management.

### **Health Safety Emergency Planning (HSEP) Department:**

The HSEP department shall:

- 1) act as the coordinator to administer and maintain this policy.
- 2) provide the necessary guidance to managers, supervisors, and workers in relation to this policy.
- 3) assist in reviewing this Policy, along with management, to ensure the effectiveness.
- 4) assist in worker education and training.
- 5) investigate any reports of unsafe working conditions and assist in resolving the concern. This includes documenting and reviewing reports of exposure to infection hazards.
- 6) document injuries/illness in compliance with policy HS 5.3 Injury Illness Incident Property Damage Investigation.

### **Human Resource Department**

The Human Resource department shall:

- 1) in collaboration with the department manager and HSEP department, report accidents/illness and exposures to WSIB using Form 7 where applicable.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Gathering and assessing the evidence**

Work-related Communicable Illnesses are caused by various infectious agents. Although not all communicable illnesses are widespread, illnesses like influenza, COVID-19, and norovirus can be prevalent in the community. Consequently, individuals may encounter multiple potential sources of infection, both within and outside of employment.

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

When adjudicating communicable illness claims, decision-makers must gather and weigh all of the relevant evidence, including medical records and evidence from both employment and non-employment contexts, to evaluate potential sources of infection. In all cases, to allow the claim, the decision-maker must be satisfied that the evidence supports that the worker contracted a specific communicable illness and that it is or is most probably work-related.

### **Determining whether the worker contracted a communicable illness**

The nature of the evidence required to establish that a worker contracted a communicable illness can vary based on the diagnostic criteria for the communicable illness and the unique circumstances of the case.

Generally, to establish that a worker contracted a specific communicable illness, one or all of the following will be necessary:

- Confirmatory testing of infection (e.g., a positive result from a laboratory or diagnostic test that establishes the presence of the infection),
- A diagnosis by a treating health professional qualified to provide such a diagnosis based on a clinical assessment of the worker during the period of illness.
- In certain situations, other evidence may be sufficient to establish that a worker contracted a specific communicable illness, including:
  - a serology test to detect a past infection,
  - results of a Health Canada approved point-of-care test showing a current infection, provided it aligns with public health guidance,
  - a report from a coroner, indicating the cause of death or a contributing factor to the death,
  - the worker's signs and symptoms, where they align with a communicable illness known to be prevalent in the employment setting, especially considering the worker's exposure history (e.g., norovirus).

### **Determining whether the communicable illness arose out of and in the course of employment**

A communicable illness is considered to arise out of and in the course of employment when, after evaluating all the relevant evidence, including any evidence suggesting the illness was contracted outside of employment, the decision-maker is satisfied that the worker's employment significantly contributed to contracting the illness through the performance of a work-related duty or an activity reasonably incidental to employment.

In determining if a worker's employment significantly contributed to contracting a communicable illness through the performance of a work-related activity, one of the following must generally be met:

#### **1. Established work-related source**

There is clear and convincing evidence that the communicable illness was contracted from an established work-related source of the illness during the performance of a work-



## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

related activity, in a manner consistent with the recognized mode of transmission for the illness. For example, a laboratory worker gets splashed in the eyes with blood known to be infected with hepatitis B while transporting it.

### **2. Increased risk due to employment**

The worker's employment placed the worker at an increased risk (i.e., increased likelihood) of contracting the communicable illness compared to the risk experienced by the general public during typical daily activities. As elaborated in the following subsections, the evidence must support that it is probable, rather than merely possible, that the worker's employment significantly contributed to their contracting of the communicable illness. For example, a childcare worker contracts norovirus after multiple cases among children on the floor of their childcare facility. The childcare worker is at an increased risk compared to the public, who would not be exposed to multiple norovirus cases during typical daily activities.

#### **Increased risk factors**

A worker's employment will generally place the worker at an increased risk of contracting a communicable illness compared to the risk experienced by the general public during typical daily activities when:

- the rate of the communicable illness is higher in the employment setting than in the general population (e.g., widespread outbreak in the workplace, treatment or care of populations with a significantly higher rate of the illness, or travel to a region with a significantly higher rate of the illness), or
- the worker's employment activities create opportunities for exposure to and transmission of the communicable illness in excess of the opportunities associated with typical daily activities, such as:
  - activities that require a worker to have contact with one or more person(s) known to have or suspected of having the communicable illness in the context of delivering health care, personal care, emergency aid, custody, or transport to these persons,
  - activities that require contact with animals known to be or suspected to be carriers of the communicable illness or, where applicable, with environments heavily contaminated with their excrement,
  - activities that require handling or contact with materials susceptible to fungal contamination (e.g., soils),
  - activities that require the worker to have contact with infectious substances, or with objects or surfaces contaminated with these substances, such as the body fluids of persons known to have or suspected of having the communicable illness, and
  - staying in employer-provided accommodations with one or more person(s) known to have or suspected of having the communicable illness (e.g., accommodations in remote mining camps, accommodations provided to temporary foreign agricultural workers).

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

### **Community-acquired communicable illnesses**

Communicable illnesses, like influenza and COVID-19, are easily transmitted and often widespread in the general population. In-person interactions that can easily spread these communicable illnesses are a part of everyday life and occur both within and outside of employment, including in the home, community, and public settings. Outside of a public health emergency, evidence that a worker has frequent in-person interactions at work (e.g., with colleagues, customers, and clients) is too speculative, on its own, to support a conclusion that the worker's employment significantly contributed to their contracting of the communicable illness. For initial entitlement to benefits, there must be evidence which makes it probable, rather than merely possible, that the worker's employment significantly contributed to their contracting of the communicable illness.

### **Hand Washing**

- 1) Washing hands often will help protect workers from illness. Workers should wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol- based hand sanitizer when soap and water is not available.
- 2) When washing with soap and water, workers should,
  - a. wash for at least 20 seconds, lathering soap and thoroughly scrub around and in-between all fingers and thumbs;
  - b. rinsing and drying hands;
  - c. turning taps off with a paper towel;
  - d. opening the room door with paper towel;
  - e. discarding the paper towel in garbage.
- 3) When using an >60% alcohol- based sanitizer, disposable wipe, or gel, rub the hands with the wipe or gel until the product is dry on the hands. Hand sanitizers do not replace washing hands with soap and water. Frequent hand washing with soap and water, or alcohol -based cleansers when away from a clean water source is the best defense against infection.

### **Cough and Sneeze Etiquette**

- 1) Influenza and Corona viruses are respiratory illnesses spread through airborne droplets. Coughing or sneezing without covering the mouth and nose will spread the germs to other people and surfaces. When coughing or sneezing, cover the mouth and the nose with a tissue and immediately discard the tissue and wash hands. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into the upper portion of the arm. This process will protect contamination of the hands and other surfaces.

### **Surface Cleansing**

- 1) Common surfaces and equipment such as reception areas, interview rooms, meeting rooms, phones, keyboards, steering wheels, doorknobs, handles and accessibility entrance mechanics shall be regularly and thoroughly cleaned with

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

disinfectant wipes or spray.

- 2) All workers should maintain clean work areas and ensure that their personal equipment is regularly thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- 3) Doorknobs and handles should be cleaned at minimum daily during active outbreaks.
- 4) Cleaning of surfaces and equipment shall be documented noting the date, time, location and person conducting the cleaning.

### **Provision of Personal Protective Equipment**

- 1) The County will follow the guidelines and recommendations of health authorities for the provision and use of personal protective equipment including face shields and masks during a viral pandemic.

### **Exposure Reporting**

- 1) Workers who suspect they have been exposed to a Communicable Illness without adequate PPE shall report the possible exposure to their supervisor immediately.
- 2) Injury/Damage Investigation Report HS 5.5 shall be completed HS 5.5 and submitted with 24 hours to their supervisor.
- 3) WSIB Forms 3958A Worker's Exposure Incident Form and 3959A Employer's Exposure Incident Form will be filed as notification to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board of worker exposure.
- 4) WSIB Form 6 Worker's Report of Injury/Disease and Form 7 Employer's Report of Injury/Disease will be filed as notification to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board as notification of worker seeking medical assistance with respect to exposure.
- 5) WSIB Forms 3958A, 3959A, 6, and 7 are available on the WSIB Website or through the supervisor.

### **Training**

- 1) Workers shall be provided with appropriate information, instruction, and supervision to protect their health and safety. All workers are encouraged to provide continuous feedback on the policy to their supervisor and JHSR. Communication will be through the following methods:
  - Corporate Health and Safety Policy Manual
  - Worker training sessions / safety talks
  - Health and Safety meetings / minutes

Training shall include:

- Identification of infection hazards
- The risk of exposure to influenza and Corona Virus and the signs and symptoms of the illness.

## **POLICY – HS 12.1 COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS INFECTION CONTROL**

---

- Safe work practices for working with infectious illness including hand washing, cough/sneeze etiquette, and common surface cleaning.
- Reporting procedures for when an injury or illness results from exposure to infectious illness.
- Location of washing facilities/equipment including dispensing of alcohol-based hand rub.
- How to report an exposure to or symptoms of influenza and Corona Virus

### **REVIEW**

The County will review this policy as needed (if required by a change in work conditions or available hazard information) and as inclusion in the Corporate Health and Safety Policy Manual. The review will be completed by the Joint Health and Safety Committee and Management Team and may include feedback from all employees.

### **RESOURCES**

- a. Cover Your Cough Poster
- b. Hand Washing Poster (Province of Ontario)
- c. Flu and You (Province of Ontario)
- d. Decision Chart (HKPR)
- e. Is this Cold or Flu
- f. Health Agency of Canada site [www.canada.ca](http://www.canada.ca)
- g. Ministry of Health of Ontario site at [www.ontario.ca](http://www.ontario.ca).
- h. Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) <https://www.wsib.ca/en/operational-policy-manual/communicable-illnesses>
- i. Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit site [www.hkpr.on.ca](http://www.hkpr.on.ca)