



Finance

Workplace Safety and Health
200-401 York Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba,
Canada R3C 0P8
T 204-945-5637 F 204-948-2209
E-mail : crystal.baldwin@gov.mb.ca
www.manitoba.ca

March 31, 2021

Ms. Dorothy Wigmore
dewwinnipeg@web.ca

Dear Ms. Wigmore:

Re: Aerosol Transmission of COVID-19

Thank you for your communication of January 21, 2021 to the Honourable Scott Fielding, Minister of Finance (Workplace Safety and Health) in which you expressed concerns about aerosol transmission of COVID-19 and the protections in place to address transmission risks. As the Executive Director of Workplace Safety and Health, I am pleased to respond.

In your letter, you specifically recommended:

- Public health messaging be updated to account for risk of aerosol transmission;
- Government order the inspection of ventilation systems, finance the upgrade of such systems in public institutions and distribute portable air filtration units where ventilation is not feasible; and,
- High-risk healthcare workers and other essential workers have access to fit-tested respirators that are N95 or equivalent.

Manitoba has guidance on the risk of aerosol transmission and, among other controls, encourages increasing fresh air and filtration where feasible. Guidance materials can be found online at https://www.manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/restartmb/pandemic_response_system.pdf and <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/providers/>.

Please be aware that the Workplace Safety and Health Branch (WSH) has been working closely with Public Health Officials since the onset of the pandemic in order to develop guidance material and ensure Manitobans are protected. As such, we took the liberty of sharing your correspondence with Manitoba Health and Seniors Care for their review.

WSH conducts inspections and investigations of workplaces in Manitoba, focusing on sectors at increased risk of COVID-19 transmission, including healthcare, manufacturing, food processing, agriculture and other essential work. WSH officers have been actively reviewing employers' assessments and controls to ensure reasonable measures have been implemented to address risks to workers.

Employers are required to implement controls sufficient to address the risk that Covid-19 presents to workers. Reasonable measures may include policies and procedures to ensure the

protection of high-risk workers as a first priority, health screening and sick leave policies, hand hygiene, enhanced cleaning and sanitization practices, physical distancing measures, barriers, worker training and protective equipment. Ventilation practices are reviewed in healthcare facilities.

With respect to protective equipment such as masks and respirators, employers are required to conduct a risk assessment based on the work being done and ensure that workers have appropriate equipment consistent with the guidelines established by Shared Health. These guidance materials can be accessed online at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/files/covid-19-provincial-ppe-requirements.pdf>.

With respect to ventilation specifically, employers are required to ensure the workplace has appropriate air quality, is adequately ventilated, and contaminants are prevented from accumulating in the air. Mechanical ventilation systems must meet the Manitoba Building code, as well as applicable standards and by-laws. WSH may request information about facility HVAC systems and maintenance schedules to ensure the employer has assessed the ventilation in the workplace. To assess the ventilation and air filtration in a workplace, WSH refers to the standards produced by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHREA), and for pandemic-related guidelines, the information published by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

For ventilation, in addition to ASHREA, PHAC refers to additional guidance from agencies such as the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies, the Canadian Committee on Indoor Air Quality Module 15 and the CDC for ventilation for work and buildings. These guidelines can all be accessed online at <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/guide-indoor-ventilation-covid-19-pandemic.html>.

WSH strongly recommends that ventilation experts be consulted to ensure ventilation is appropriate for the workplace.

I thank you for bringing your concern forward, your support in worker safety and health and your contribution to the prevention of COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Crystal Baldwin
Director, Workplace Safety and Health

c: Honourable Scott Fielding, Minister of Finance
Honourable Heather Stefanson, Minister of Health and Seniors Care