

TIP SHEET

Safe Driving for Community Health-care Workers

Background

Driving is an essential part of the job for health-care workers who deliver care or provide health-care services to clients in the community and in their residence.

Risks

Just like traditional workplaces, there are several risks associated with driving that can lead to an accident and possible injury or death.

- Distractions such as using mobile devices, reading maps or using GPS devices, adjusting entertainment systems, eating lunch and answering emails all divert your concentration and eyes away from the road.
- Fatigue that affects your ability to concentrate while driving.
- Heavy workloads as well as not having enough time scheduled between appointments can result in speeding or unsafe driving.
- Poor weather conditions affect speed of driving, ability to drive safely and driving routes if roads are closed or impassable.
- Vehicle breakdown can leave workers stranded or in unsafe conditions, especially if the breakdown is in a secluded area or on a busy road or highway.
- Prolonged sitting or awkward positions can result in ergonomic hazards.

Legislation

When driving is required for work, it is considered the same as any other work-related activity, so the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)* applies. Employers and supervisors are required to implement policies, train workers and ensure workers are safe while driving for work.

While driving is not directly covered under *OHSA*, the general duties for employers and supervisors under Sections 25 and 27 of *OHSA* address the duties of employers with some key duties related to safe driving including:

- Provide information, instruction and supervision to a worker to protect their health or safety (*OHSA* sec 25(2)(a)).
- Acquaint a worker or a person in authority over a worker with any hazard in the work and in the handling, storage, use, disposal and transport of any article, device, equipment or a biological, chemical or physical agent (*OHSA* sec 25(2)(d)).
- Advise workers of any existing potential or actual dangers to the health and safety of the worker that they are aware of (*OHSA* sec 27(2)(a)).
- Provide a worker with the written instructions as to the measures and procedures to be taken for the protection of the worker (*OHSA* sec 27(2)(b)).
- Take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker (*OHSA* sec 25(2)(h) & sec 27(2)(c)).

Workers also have duties under *OHSA* and those that apply to safe driving include:

- Work in compliance with the provisions of this *Act* and the regulations (*OHSA* sec 28 (1)(a)).
- Use or wear the equipment, protective devices or clothing that the worker's employer requires to be used or worn (*OHSA* sec 28 (1)(b)).
- Report to their employer or supervisor the absence of or defect in any equipment or protective device of which the worker is aware and which may endanger themselves or another worker (*OHSA* sec 28(1)(c)).
- Report to their employer or supervisor any contravention of this *Act* or the regulations or the existence of any hazard of which they know (*OHSA* sec 28(1)(d)).

In the case that an injury or illness occurs while driving for work, if the employer is covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (*WSIA*), workers are covered for those injuries and illnesses as they would be if they occurred in a physical workplace. Workers not covered by *WSIA* could have health-care benefits as well as income replacement covered by private (health or disability) insurance and/or their automobile insurance.

The last legislation to consider is the *Ontario Highway Traffic Act*. This legislation sets out requirements for:

- Fees and penalties related to the issue, renewal, replacement or transfer of vehicle permits, licenses and license plates.
- Permit requirements.
- Insurance requirements.
- Parking permits.
- Driver's licences.
- Rates of speed.
- Rules of the road.
- Municipal by-laws.
- Reporting of accidents.
- Red light cameras and speed enforcement.
- Cancellation of a vehicle permit or driver's license.

Employer & Supervisor Duties

To help ensure that workers are safe when driving for work, there are several actions employers and supervisors can implement:

1. Conduct a risk assessment for the hazard of driving and implement corrective actions where possible.
2. Make workers aware of potential and actual hazards identified in the risk assessment, including potential ergonomic hazards.
3. Develop safe driving policies as well as policies for inclement weather.
4. Provide training on policies and procedures, vehicle safety and client transport if that is an expectation.
5. Ensure workers have the required license and insurance.
6. Increase awareness of safe driving, especially as seasons change and risk of inclement weather becomes more likely.
7. Investigate and respond to concerns raised by workers.

8. Encourage musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) injury prevention activities and resources.
9. Provide workers with an emergency kit for their vehicle.
10. Check in with workers according to the work-alone policy or check-in protocol.
11. Ensure workers are able to call for assistance. In rural areas, where cellular service may be limited, this may mean ensuring workers can access a satellite network.

Worker Duties

Workers must take measures to ensure they are safe when driving. The following tips can apply to both personal vehicles as well as employer-provided vehicles.

Vehicle safety

- Maintain your vehicle with regular maintenance and use winter tires.
- Always travel with enough gas. Half a tank or more is recommended.
- Have spare windshield washer fluid and a snow/ice brush during the winter.
- Keep a phone charger in the vehicle.
- Ensure an emergency kit is available in the vehicle and that it is well stocked.

Prepare for your drive

- Do a walkabout of your vehicle before driving to detect hazards such as damage, leaks or flat tires.
- Adjust mirrors, seat and entertainment system before driving.
- Eat and drink between appointments and not while driving.
- Check the weather forecast and road conditions.
- Check addresses and enter them in your phone or GPS system.
- Allow for enough time between appointments and adjust for traffic and weather conditions.

Avoid fatigue

- Get enough sleep each night.
- Make frequent stops if driving long distances (recommend once every two hours).
- Recognize signs of tiredness or fatigue.

Prevent MSD Injuries

- Adjust your seat to a comfortable position and use ergonomic supports (headrest, arm rests and lumbar supports).
- Avoid prolonged sitting and incorporate stretching between clients or before long drives.
- Avoid awkward positions when loading and unloading your vehicle.

General

- Drive defensively, following the rules of the road.
- Park in well-lit locations.
- Always lock your vehicle and keep valuables hidden and out of sight.
- Have your keys ready when walking to your vehicle.
- Always wear your seatbelt and be sure to obey speed limits and traffic signs.
- Complete employer training and adhere to the employer's policies and procedures.
- Report near misses, minor injuries and unsafe conditions to the supervisor.

Joint Health and Safety Committee Tips

There are several things that the JHSC can do to ensure workers required to drive are safe:

- 1) Participate in the employer’s driving risk assessments.
- 2) Ensure safe driving policies and procedures are in place and are reviewed annually.
- 3) Ensure workers are trained upon hire and retrained annually thereafter.
- 4) Review training materials to ensure they are comprehensive. Workers should be trained on the employer’s safe driving policies, procedures for vehicle breakdown, inclement weather and ergonomic considerations for driving.
- 5) Review incidents related to driving and make recommendations to address gaps.
- 6) Ensure workers have access to safe driving kits and supplies to replenish these kits.
- 7) Ensure employer-provided vehicles are well maintained, in good mechanical condition and repairs and routine maintenance are done regularly.

Contact your Bargaining Unit President or Labour Relations Officer with any questions.

References

1. Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA)
Driving Safety for Workers
<https://www.pshsa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/PSHSA-Driving-Safety-for-Workers-DLEFCAEN0100.pdf>
2. Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)
Driving – Winter
https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety_haz/drive/icesnow.pdf

Driving and Ergonomics
<https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/driving.pdf>