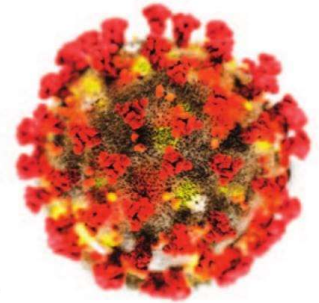


# ‘Review and adapt’ to prepare policies for second pandemic wave



**Participants in a RESCON webinar on October 13 discussed how to keep workers safe during the emerging second COVID-19 wave, and with the additional challenge of winter weather to come.**

As fall turns into winter, all of Ontario is struggling to contain the further spread of COVID-19.

At well over 700 daily, the number of daily cases being reported to provincial public health officials in mid-October were higher than they ever have been. This fact has prompted the Ontario government to close many types of non-essential businesses, such as restaurants and gyms, in such hotspots as Ottawa, Toronto and Peel.

The worsening case load, combined with the promise of inclement weather to come, is causing the construction industry to re-evaluate its approach to maintaining health and safety on its sites.

How to handle site safety during the second COVID wave was the focus of a webinar delivered by the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) and the League of Champions on October 13.

Participating were leaders from several residential, commercial and civil construction firms, as well as Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development Monte McNaughton and Chief Prevention Officer Ron Kelusky.

“Data from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board shows that construction had one of the smallest circles of outbreaks of COVID-19 prior to the second curve,” said Kelusky. “But the numbers are only going to get worse before they get better.”

Kelusky urged vigilance. He reminded participants and viewers that COVID fatigue is setting in for many people, and now is not the time for complacency.

“More vigilance is needed,” he said. “If we drop our guard even slightly, the virus can come into construction and make it impossible for people to come to work.”



“People are feeling overloaded with the information that’s out there, but we can’t let that slip,” said Lesurf. “The key is to be bite-sized and to always reinforce safe practices.”



He added that many of those regions of the province that are hardest hit by the virus—Toronto, Ottawa, Peel, Durham, York, Halton, Niagara and Hamilton—are where the lion’s share of the province’s infrastructure is being built. To help the industry respond, Kelusky’s office is working with sectors like construction to update guidance documents that were issued in the spring. Those are expected to be published soon.

The focus webinar then turned to a panel discussion about on-site best practices for controlling the spread of COVID-19. Speaking were Craig Lesurf, president of Gillam Group and chair of the League of Champions; Enzo Garritano, president & CEO of the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA); and Ketan Patel, the senior H&S manager with residential developers Tribute. RESCON vice-president Andrew Pariser moderated the discussion.

Pariser asked the participants about some of the approaches they have used to help control the spread of the virus. Garritano explained that IHSA has published as many as 40 resources for construction, including videos, posters, stickers and guides for distribution. Lesurf said the key for his company has been to share best practices with other firms and to borrow those approaches that have been proven effective elsewhere. He added that, to be effective, the safety message had to be communicated and demonstrated by company leaders. Patel concluded by saying it was important to remind workers that the virus is a community safety problem, not just a workplace issue.

The conversation then turned to COVID fatigue and how contractors are managing that.

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As the weather turns colder, the industry will have a new challenge: delivering hand-wash stations in, and adapting personal protective equipment for, the cold weather.

The panelists said communication is key to keeping

workers informed about the changes in sanitation approaches, whether that’s changing locations of hand-wash stations as construction progresses, or adopting new types of equipment.

“Review everything you’ve done since March and adapt them for the weather to come,” said Garritano. “Start now.”

The conversation concluded with a discussion of how several contractors dealt with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 on their sites.

Craig Sparks, the national health and safety manager with Maple Reinders, in particular, pointed to the difference in his firm’s responses to two cases—one at the early stage of the pandemic, and the other later in the summer. The company’s response to the first case, in Alberta, was characterized by little communication and a great deal of confusion, and caused the site to be shut down for two weeks.

Its response to its second incident in Ontario, in September, drew on developed tools and strong channels of communication to minimize panic and confusion. The company was able to keep its site running with only minimal required sanitization, and no further risk to the health and safety of those affected and those around them.

Darrin Husack of Condrain said his company found out about its positive case after the worker had been on site for several days after being infected. The company found seven other site workers who had come into contact with this person. Those people were isolated and returned to work healthy in due time.

“The key for us was to get in front of communication early to make everyone aware of what had happened, and to control the spread of mis-information,” he said. “We kept providing updates and communications to keep people in the loop and to show how seriously we took the incident.”

The presenters agreed the communication is the key to managing fear and confusion if a case appears on site. Having good programs and policies in place, and reviewing these continuously, is key.