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Workplaces have the tools to fight the pandemic



Jackie Jones



Jackie Jones is the MHCA WORKSAFELY™ Education and Diversity Programs Advisor

We all know that prevention measures work in controlling physical and health hazards in our workplaces – engineering controls, safe work procedures and personal protective equipment. Dealing with the hazard presented by COVID-19 is no different. Workplaces, and indeed all of us, have the tools to fight COVID-19.

“With over 75,000 employers in Manitoba, we can’t have a one-size-fits-all approach,” says Dr. Denise Koh, Chief Occupational Medical Officer. “So it’s important for employers to continually assess the risk factors unique to their worksite, their workforce and their industry itself in light of our constantly changing circumstances, and then implement control measures to mitigate that risk.”

“Keeping the hierarchy of controls in mind is so important in this pandemic, because our public health orders and guidelines reflect that,” continues Dr. Koh. “Our vaccines are very safe, extremely effective, and really our best and only way out of this pandemic, so that’s why we’ve put most of our eggs in the ‘vaccine basket’. They’re at the top of the hierarchy because they help eliminate the hazard from the workplace and can also be seen as an administrative control.”

The implementation of proven prevention measures such as masks, hygiene and social distancing have helped prevent the spread of COVID-19 in heavy construction workplaces, allowing our industry to continue to work through the pandemic. COVID-19 vaccines are very effective at reducing transmission and preventing illness and hospitalizations. Prevention measures work.

As the province slowly begins its journey to recovery following COVID-19, the heavy construction industry will continue to move forward and grow from lessons learned in this past year. At the beginning of the pandemic, the heavy construction industry was deemed essential and was able to continue its work throughout the lock down.

The most significant lesson learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic was the value of re-focusing on workplace safety and health. Of course, this always has been a priority in the heavy construction industry, but the onset of the pandemic meant that following all pertinent safety protocols became even more important.

The importance of health and hygiene, as well as safety, were amplified. All of this has had to happen while maintaining safety standards to address common hazards present in the more traditional aspects of heavy construction.

To adapt and succeed, businesses must move forward with resiliency and caution. It goes without saying that it is in a company’s best interest to continue to take COVID-19 safety just as seriously as all other aspects of workplace safety.

Despite the changing status of provincial public health restrictions, and given the risks associated with COVID-19 variants, WORKSAFELY™ strongly recommends that companies continue to practice prevention measures – wearing masks indoors, social distancing

and effective hygiene.

Masks, considered as PPE for this pandemic, are very important, especially when minimum distancing can’t be maintained, Dr. Koh says. “They are considered our last line of defense because they are the least effective of the controls and the most difficult to implement and ensure compliance.

“Interestingly, we’ve normalized mask-wearing in everyday life, so the compliance and implementation challenges are less of a problem here, and we’re really seeing the added benefits from this control and our social change overall in terms of mitigating the risk.”

WORKSAFELY™ strongly recommends that people get vaccinated against COVID-19 and that employers encourage their workers to do the same.

So, let’s use what we know about prevention to put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. Let’s get vaccinated!



Dr. Denise Koh
 Chief Occupational Medical Officer



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