

# Solid Waste and Recycling Management

## Purpose

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, this document provides supplementary information to those responsible within First Nations communities for waste and recycling management practices. Local and provincial/territorial, or federal regulatory requirements should also be taken into account.

For additional information, please contact your community's Environmental Public Health Officer.

## Scope

This guideline applies to solid waste and recycling that may be contaminated with the virus that causes COVID-19. Waste can be classified into the following two categories:

- Municipal waste (household waste, business waste, etc.) and
- Medical waste

## Background

Generally, the management of waste and recycling that is suspected to or is known to be contaminated with COVID-19 does not require any special precautions beyond those already used to protect workers from the hazards they encounter during their routine job tasks in solid waste including medical waste management.

However, strict adherence to existing waste management procedures can limit potential secondary health impacts.

### 1. Municipal Waste management

Municipal waste is a type of waste that consists of typical, everyday items that are thrown away by community residents.

Workers and employers should manage municipal solid waste with potential or known COVID-19 contamination like any other non-contaminated municipal waste. To prevent exposure to waste streams, including any contaminants in materials, workers should manage all solid waste in a similar manner to existing methods such as:

- Following typical engineering and administrative controls
- Adhering to safe work practices, and
- Using appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), such as puncture-resistant gloves, eye protection and boots.

Such measures can also help protect workers from improperly disposed sharps and other items that can cause injuries or exposures to infectious materials.



If municipal waste is normally transferred to facilities off-reserve and this service has been temporarily halted, please contact your community's Environmental Public Health Officer or Environment Officer for additional advice.

## **2. Health Facility Waste**

There is no current evidence that direct, unprotected human contact during the handling of medical waste has resulted in the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Disposal of health facility waste should continue as per standard procedures. Effective management of waste generated in home care and public health facilities requires segregation into general (municipal) waste, biomedical waste, sharps waste, medication waste and dialysis waste.

Best practices for safely managing health care waste should be followed, including assigning responsibility and sufficient human and material resources to dispose of such waste safely.

All health facility waste should be collected safely in designated containers/bags, and safely disposed of.

All who handle health care waste should:

- Wear appropriate PPE (boots, apron, long-sleeved gown, thick gloves, mask, and goggles or a face shield) and
- Perform hand hygiene immediately after handling it.

For more information, refer to the AHS document, Provincial Guide-Community Based Services Waste Disposal: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-tms-nfles-community-based-services-waste-disposal-guideline.pdf>, and the WHO guidance, Safe management of wastes from health-care activities: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>.

For medical waste with potential or known COVID-19 contamination, transport like any other regulated medical waste as COVID-19 is not a Category A infectious substance. For more information, refer to the COVID-19: Requirements for safe transportation of infectious substances (Class 6.2): <https://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/tdg/covid-19-requirements-safe-transportation-infectious-substances-class-6-2.html>.

## **3. Recycling industry**

As with municipal waste, employers and workers in the recycling industry should continue to use typical engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE to prevent worker exposure to and injury from recyclable materials they manage, including any contaminants in the materials.

## **4. General guidance for all workers and employers**

For all workers, regardless of specific exposure risks, there are a number of good practices to reduce exposure to COVID-19. These include:

- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When soap and running water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with gloved or unwashed hands;
- Practice good respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes;
- Avoid contact with others, especially those who have travelled or been exposed to the virus.

If contact cannot be avoided, take the following precautions:

- Keep at least 2 metres between yourself and the other person, or in cases where a 2 metre separation cannot be maintained wear a non-medical face covering to prevent person-to-person transmission.
- Give a friendly wave instead of a handshake, kiss or hug
- Keep interactions brief
- Stay home if sick

For updated information, refer to : <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

## 5. References

- <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/waste-management-essential-public-service-fight-beat-covid-19>
- <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html>
- <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>
- <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>
- <https://www.owma.org/articles/covid-19-guidance-for-waste-workers>
- <https://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/tdg/covid-19-requirements-safe-transportation-infectious-substances-class-6-2.html>
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>
- AHS Provincial Guide Community Based Services Waste Disposal:  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-tms-nfles-community-based-services-waste-disposal-guideline.pdf>