

FAQ for Members

1. What is COVID-19? How it is spread? What are the symptoms?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more serious respiratory infections like bronchitis, pneumonia or severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). These viruses are spread mainly from person to person through close contact, for example, in a household, workplace or health care centre. The COVID-19 strain is characterized by symptoms including a runny nose, sore throat, shortness of breath, cough, and fever.

2. What happens if I visit a country that has been identified as an Impacted Area by the Public Health Agency of Canada?

Currently, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has identified travel to the following places are being higher risk: China, Iran, Italy, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, France, Germany, Spain. For people who have travelled to China, Iran, or Italy in the last 14 days are being requested to self-isolate for a total of 14 days. If you have traveled to any of the other countries, the PHAC recommends monitoring your health and seeking appropriate treatment should symptoms begin.

3. Do I have to self-disclose any recent travel to my Employer?

Yes, it is the Union's recommendation that notify your Employer of your travel history. Further, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health is now advising Ontarians against all non-essential travel outside of Canada.

4. Do I have to self-disclose any signs of illness to my Employer?

Yes, you are required to disclose if you are experiencing any of the symptoms noted above including but not limited to: fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Given that we work with vulnerable patients/clients/residents, it is in the best interest of public health to stay home if you are symptomatic.

5. What do I do if I am concerned that I may have been exposed to, or am experiencing symptoms of COVID-19?

Please contact Telehealth Ontario, your primary care physician or your local public health unit. Please ensure that you notify your Employer immediately. Please do not call 911 unless it is an emergency.

6. What happens if my Employer requires that I self-isolate?

If your Employer sends you home from work and states that you are to enter into a self-isolation protocol as a part of a preventive health policy related to COVID-19, it is the position of the Union and public health agencies that you must comply with their direction.

7. Will I be paid by my Employer during self-isolation and/or the government mandated Quarantine Period?

It is the position of the Union that your Employer is responsible to pay you for your regularly scheduled shifts. Further, such payments will not draw from any banked/earned hours or credits, including vacation or sick pay.

8. What if my Employer refuses to pay me during my period of self-isolation and/or the government mandated Quarantine Period?

If your Employer refuses to pay or insists on drawing from your banked credits, including your vacation or sick time, please contact a steward to file a grievance on your behalf.

9. Am I entitled to claim EI sick benefits during self-isolation or the government mandated Quarantine Period?

Yes, the Government of Canada has eliminated the one (1) week waiting period for EI sick benefits. This means that if you are quarantined for two (2) weeks, you will be compensated for the entire two (2) weeks. In order to qualify for EI benefits, you must have worked a minimum of 600 hours in the previous year, or since your last EI claim. The current EI payment is 55% of your earnings, to a weekly maximum of \$573. The Government has also waived the requirement to provide a medical note where you have been required by law or a public-health official to enter the Quarantine Period.

10. What information can my Employer request from me?

Your Employer can make reasonable requests regarding travel, exposures, symptoms and work at other health care facilities and/or community programs. Given that we are currently in a pandemic, Employers and Employees should make every effort to limit transmission and exposure to other members, staff, patients, clients, or residents.

11. What are recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID19?

Public Health Ontario recommends the following:

- practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands often with soap and water for at least twenty (20) seconds or thoroughly with alcohol-based hand sanitizer,
- avoid touching your face, including your eyes, nose and mouth,
- ensure you cough into a tissue (and immediately dispose of it) or the elbow of your sleeve,
- minimize public contact/practice social distancing,
- stay home if you are exhibiting symptoms,
- stay updated on developing protocols and practices.

12. What Protective Equipment does my Employer have to provide?

Your Employer is required to provide all appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The Union, along with public health agencies recommend the following:

- alcohol-based hand sanitizer,
- a procedural mask (preferably a N95 respirator),
- disposable gowns,
- gloves,
- face shield/eye protection (the Union recommends as best practice where warranted),
- tissues.

13. Is my Employer required to train me on the appropriate use of Personal Protective Equipment?

Yes, under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, your Employer is required to ensure that all members are properly trained on the use of PPE. This includes but is not limited to, properly sizing, fitting, testing, donning and doffing.

14. Can I refuse work that I feel may be unsafe?

As per the OHSA, members can refuse unsafe work. You will be required to qualify what specifically you deem to be unsafe. You must remain in the area and wait for a Certified Worker Co-Chair to attend the area and to speak with the Management Co-Chair. If an agreement cannot be reached, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) will be called to investigate and make a determination. Please note, the threshold for work refusal is high given the expected occupational hazards within a healthcare setting.

15. What signage should be posted in my workplace?

Signage should be posted at each entrance to the facility notifying that Active Screening protocols are in place. The Employer should also ensure that isolation rooms/units are clearly identified.

16. Can I refuse to be screened when entering my workplace?

The Union's position is that limiting the transmission of COVID-19 is a public health priority. As such, we are not advising that members refuse to be screened. If a member refuses to be screened by their Employer, we anticipate that they will be denied entry and will not be eligible for leave with pay. The Union will not be grieving these cases.

17. Who should be conducting Active Screening at my workplace?

The Union's position is that Active Screening is to be conducted by trained staff members, which may include non-bargaining unit staff in cases of emergency. Employees who are conducting Active Screening must be provided with appropriate PPE.

18. Will my absence count against the Attendance Management Program?

The Union's position is that any illness related to COVID-19, including periods of self-isolation and government mandated quarantine shall be deemed non-culpable and will be excluded from any Attendance Management Program. We will be addressing this matter directly with your Employer.

19. Can my Employer cancel my vacation during this pandemic?

Yes, given that the WHO has declared a global pandemic, operational requirements will supersede pre-approved vacation.

20. What else is my Union doing to help protect me?

The Union is continuing to work with both Federal and Provincial governments, as well as their associated Health Agencies and we are a key stakeholder in many working groups and committees aimed at COVID-19 preparedness and planning. We recognize and appreciate the work of all of our healthcare members and are committed to providing strong advocacy and support during this difficult period. We will continue to communicate the importance of adequate staffing and PPE to all levels of government and your Employer. Further, we are working with your Employer(s) to ensure that the health and safety of our members are a top priority and to mitigate any potential financial impact.