

Webinar #1 – Intro to Health and Safety

Here are ten of the most frequently asked questions

1. What if I get infected with COVID-19 while working?

A: After receiving a diagnosis from your doctor, you should report it immediately to your supervisor so that the employer can take appropriate precautions. You should file a WSIB (Workers Safety and Insurance Board) claim and complete the form 7 (which is available online). Make sure that you tell your doctor that you believe you were infected while working.

2. What if someone tests positive for the virus at my workplace?

A: In such an extreme case the local Public Health Agency would provide directives to the employer on actions they would be required to take. Also, the health and safety committee and union should be involved in those actions.

3. What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

A: Both the governments of Canada and Ontario have created a self-assessment tool on their government websites. This self-assessment tool will help determine whether you may need further assessment or testing for COVID-19. You can complete this assessment for yourself, or on behalf of someone else, if they are unable to.

4. We have received numerous questions about the application of code 6990 also referred to as 699. Here is a brief description of that code.

A: Code 6990 is for members who work for the Treasury Board and is a provision in their collective agreement.

The information provided by the Treasury Board says: If you are unable to work because of COVID-related illnesses, you will also be eligible for 'Other Leave With Pay (699)'. This means that you are:

- *diagnosed with COVID-19*
- *experiencing COVID-19 symptoms*
- *at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19, living with someone that is at high risk as described by the Public Health Agency of Canada and cannot work remotely*
- *This may also apply to those who do not have alternate childcare arrangements while schools are closed*

If you fall in to one of these categories, you are expected to be in regular contact with your manager, who will assess the need for continued leave. This assessment will take into account

your working conditions, the protective measures in place at your work site, and the need of services for the safety and security of Canadians.

As a member of the federal public service, you are asked to adopt a good faith approach in using this leave, keeping in mind the need to provide critical services to Canadians at this time. Your manager will ask you to attest to the situation preventing you from working.

And in all instances, you should be in constant contact with your local executive officers and component reps.

For members who are provincially regulated, please check your collective agreement for additional leave provisions. If you need help, please contact your local executive or regional representative. PSAC is continuing to work with employers to allow members to avail themselves of any provisions and assistance available.

5. Who determines if my job is essential and where would I find that information out?

A: The Policy on Government Security defines what is essential work and what is critical work.

The Government of Canada website it reads:

Essential workers are considered critical to preserving life, health and basic societal functioning. This includes, but is not limited to, first responders, health care workers, critical infrastructure workers, hydro and natural gas, and workers who are essential to supply society with critical goods such as food and medicines.

From the PSAC website:

The government re-issued directives to department heads including this clarification:

“Managers are to consider on-site work only if the work meets the definition of critical service and working remotely to support it is not feasible.

A critical service is one that, if disrupted, would result in a high or very high degree of injury to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians, or to the effective functioning of the Government of Canada. All departments are required to identify their respective critical services and related supporting resources.”

For provincially regulated workplaces, Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, determined the list of essential businesses that can remain open. The restrictions are aimed at further reducing contact between people and stopping the spread of COVID-19.

6. Whether we are working from home or still in our workplaces should we still have Health & Safety meetings?

A: Under both the Canada Labour Code and the Occupational Health and Safety Act Health and Safety meetings shall be held a minimum of 9 times a year. In times of crisis or emergency the committee shall meet as required during regular working hours or outside those hours. Given the current public health directives such meetings should be more frequent and if in-person meetings cannot be held, then teleconference meetings can take place. The Health and Safety committee plays a vital role in protecting the rights of workers but it is ultimately the employers responsibility to maintain a healthy and safe workplace.

7. Will we get a copy of the presentation?

A: Yes, copies of the PowerPoint, handouts and a video of this presentation will be available on the PSAC Ontario website in the coming days.

8. If I am working from home does my employer have to pay for my internet?

A: The employer is required to provide you with the tools you need to do your job, whatever those tools may be. You, the Union and the employer are in the best position to determine those tools are.

9. What if my co-workers aren't adhering to physical distancing directives when they are not at work?

A: I would raise the issue the Local and/or component and let them know your concerns, I would suggest that some major education could be done in your workplace. This is an opportunity for the Union and frankly the employer to do some meaningful health and safety training.

10. Lots of you are asking about handwashing – what does handwashing have to do with anything? How can I keep my co-workers accountable to maintain good hand hygiene?

A: We think it's important to stress hand hygiene because we know that touching infected surfaces and then touching your face is the primary method of transmitting the virus. Repeated reminders can never hurt, only help. We suggest that you print out the handouts on proper handwashing techniques and post them throughout your workplace or even in your home as a regular reminder. This also goes for the handouts on physical distancing and even the one on managing stress.