

NAVIGATING YOUR RIGHTS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated March 18, 2020.

How long will OPSEU's buildings, including membership centres, be closed?

OPSEU began closing its buildings beginning end of business Wednesday March 11, 2020 and set an example on social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As of right now, all OPSEU buildings are closed until Monday, March 30th. OPSEU will assess the situation prior to that date to determine if it is safe to reopen.

During the building closure period, all OPSEU meetings, gatherings, educationals, arbitration hearings and the like will be postponed or adjourned. Where possible, meetings will be conducted via teleconference. All OPSEU staff continue to work remotely.

What is OPSEU doing for me during this time?

OPSEU and its staff are working to support you, defend your rights, and ensure you are protected. OPSEU's leadership is constantly in contact with the provincial government and Ontario's labour leaders, ensuring that front-line workers have the support they need during this crisis. We will be posting updates and statements that come out of these conversations daily to our website.

What is OPSEU's COVID-19 Triage Project?

OPSEU recognizes that this is a difficult time for all. Anxiety is high. In response to the quickly changing times OPSEU is in the process of implementing sector specific regional triage teams. The regional teams will be a support to the staff reps already working in the regions. Your Staff Rep will remain your main point of contact for any issues.

What are the work stoppages that have been mandated as a result of the State of Emergency?

The State of Emergency has declared no gatherings of over 50 people and the closure of certain public spaces. For example:

- Bars and restaurants (takeout and delivery may be still available)
- Licensed child-care centres
- Schools and Private schools
- Theatres



- Recreation Centres (including visitor services at parks) AND GYMS
- Visitor and Cultural attractions

What can I do to protect myself if I am unable to work from home?

Many of our members do not work in jobs that easily translate to remote work. If you are in this situation, it is important that you follow all health and safety protocols related to your workplace. Under the Occupational Health & Safety Act, most of Ontario's workers have the right to refuse unsafe work, however, you should always consult your Staff Rep before refusing any work. It is also recommended that you practice social distancing and proper hygiene as much as possible to reduce the risk of infection.

Is there any financial help available?

On March 18th the Federal Government announced new economic measures to help workers, families and businesses cope with financial hardship. For more information, [visit here](#).

Should I access my Employment Insurance (EI) Benefits?

OPSEU recommends working with your employer to develop a strategy to work from home or find alternative work arrangements to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Employment Insurance (EI) should only be accessed by those who cannot find alternative solutions with their employer. If your employer is laying you off during this time please contact your Staff Rep immediately.

Who is Eligible for EI?

Workers who pay EI premiums are eligible for EI if:

- o you cannot work because of a medical condition, such as COVID-19;
- o you have lost at least 40 per cent of your usual weekly pay; and
- o you have worked a minimum of 600 hours in the year before your claim, or since your last EI claim.

Contact the new dedicated toll-free phone number if you are in quarantine and seeking to waive the one-week EI sickness benefits waiting period so you can be paid for the first week of your claim:

- o Telephone: 1-833-381-2725 (toll-free)
- o Teletypewriter (TTY): 1-800-529-3742

Do I need to provide a doctor's note to my employer to get my sick-leave benefits?



While a medical certificate signed by your doctor is usually required to get your sick-leave benefits, this will not be the case during the COVID-19 crisis. During this time, the government is waiving the need for a sick note for patients who are required to miss work due to self-isolation or quarantine.

[Will my time off during self-isolation or quarantine be paid by my employer?](#)

OPSEU's position is that all employers should continue paying their employees during self-isolation and quarantine.

If your work can be done remotely, for the period of self-isolation or quarantine where you are not sick, your employer should be allowing remote work. If you become sick, your sick day entitlements will vary depending on the language in your collective agreement. If you have zero sick leave benefits—the Employment Standards Act applies, which is currently three unpaid days.

All workers are entitled to the minimum standards set out in the Employment Standards Act. However, OPSEU believes employers should be making exceptions to these entitlements based on the current crisis situation, and in reflection of the fact that the federal government has indicated it will provide financial support to businesses to continue to pay employees during self-isolation and quarantine.

[Please watch for further updates.](#)