

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR OPS EMPLOYEES RE: 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Last Updated: **June 11, 2020**

For the latest information, the government has set up a web page where people can [learn more about the 2019 novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and stay informed through daily updates](#).

These Qs & As will be updated as new information becomes available.

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## Questions and Answers

### Public Services

**Q1. Will the Ontario Public Service (OPS) continue to provide public services as usual?**

**A.** The Secretary of Cabinet has reiterated that the OPS will only be asking employees to attend the workplace in-person, where a ministry requires them to deliver critical services. When it is critical for OPS employees to attend the workplace to maintain delivery of critical services, precautions are being taken to help our workplaces remain safe, including physical distancing, necessary cleaning protocols, and provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) as appropriate.

The OPS is taking steps to continue to provide public services while leveraging alternative work arrangements where operationally feasible. All services that can be delivered remotely will continue. Employees who do not support critical services and who cannot work remotely will be asked to remain at home.

Physical distancing and hand hygiene are essential to protecting our health and the health of others and restricting the spread of the virus.

We understand that this situation may cause staff concern about potential health risks in our province. However, our integrated health care system is well prepared to manage this situation.

Ontario officials are actively working with partners in the health care system at the municipal, provincial and federal levels to monitor, detect and contain this emerging health issue in the province.

Our first priority is to protect the health and safety of our employees.

We will continue to monitor developments on COVID-19 take the advice provided by the Ministry of Health, Chief Medical Officer of Health and Public Health Officials, and keep employees informed of any new developments.

For the latest information, the Ministry of Health has set up a dedicated web page which is updated daily, seven days a week where people can [learn more about the 2019 novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and stay informed](#). Visit [Ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus).

## Gradual Reopening of the Workplace

### Q2. What is the OPS' plan to return employees to the workplace? (NEW)

- A. The OPS is planning for a gradual, measured re-opening of workplaces. This work is ongoing, and plans have not yet been finalized.

We are committed to protecting employees and the public by ensuring a balanced and safe re-opening of workplaces, informed by the best advice from the Ministry of Health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health relies on the best advice from our public health officials.

As an organization with varied and diverse program areas, our approach will provide enterprise-wide guidance that emphasizes ministries' responsibility for their unique workplaces and consideration of individual sites, regional differences, and the nature of the services being delivered.

### Q3. When will OPS staff that have been working remotely begin returning to work? (NEW)

- A. The planning process for the gradual reopening of OPS workplaces is well underway, however no concrete timelines have been determined. The reopening of OPS workplaces will be gradual as we are taking a pragmatic, realistic, and cautious approach. We are committed to protecting employees and the public by ensuring a balanced and safe re-opening of workplaces, informed by the best advice from the Ministry of Health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Nothing is more important than the well-being of OPS employees. The timing of phasing OPS staff back in the workplace will be informed by future announcements regarding the timing of the phases related to the *Framework for Reopening our Province* and we will make this transition with the utmost care and attention to physical and mental health.

### Q4. Will employees continue be able to continue to work remotely? (NEW)

- A. The well-being of OPS employees is priority. The timing of phasing OPS staff back in the workplace will be informed by future announcements regarding the timing of the phases related to the Framework for Reopening our Province and we will make this transition with the utmost care and attention to physical and mental health.

The OPS will continue to embrace flexible work arrangements and technological solutions, where possible, to keep delivering high-quality services to the people of Ontario. We will continue to explore how these shifts in organizational culture can be leveraged and enhanced. The OPS has an opportunity to continue driving transformation through increased remote work, increased use of technology and

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process innovation. For further information on tips, tools and other resources on working remotely please visit the [Infrastructure Technology Services site](#) on working remotely.

### Employee Health and Safety

#### **Q5. What is the Government doing to prepare for OPS employees to safely return to the workplace?**

**A.** The Government has started to plan what a safe and gradual return to work in the OPS would look like. That planning will build on the lessons learned in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, and the gains that have made in becoming a more agile and tech savvy workplace. The Government will be looking into how we can safely and effectively reintegrate the OPS workforce while maintaining these new innovative improvements.

#### **Q6. What is the Government doing to protect its employees from COVID-19?**

**A.** The health and safety of our employees is our top priority.

The Secretary of Cabinet has reiterated that the OPS will only be asking employees to attend the workplace in-person, where a ministry requires them to deliver critical services. When it is critical for OPS employees to attend the workplace to maintain delivery of critical services, precautions are being taken to help ensure our workplaces remain safe.

The OPS is taking steps to continue to provide public services while leveraging alternative work arrangements where operationally feasible. It is important that OPS employees work from home unless it is critical for them to remain in the workplace to maintain delivery of services.

All services that can be delivered remotely will continue. Employees who do not support critical services and who cannot work remotely will be asked to remain at home until further notice from the Employer.

Physical distancing and hand hygiene are essential to protecting our health and the health of others and restricting the spread of the virus. It is important that OPS employees work from home unless it is critical for them to remain in the workplace to maintain delivery of services.

Appropriate cleaning continues to be undertaken to reduce risk to staff and visitors within OPS occupied buildings. The current cleaning practice is to help ensure a hygienic workplace is maintained. Environmentally friendly cleaning products that are effective at reducing the spread of bacteria and viruses are used.

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In addition, the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) is coordinating with Infrastructure Ontario and ministry Chief Administrative Officer's on the delivery of enhanced cleaning of all high contact areas at least three additional times per day at certain OPS occupied locations, in circumstances where cleaning above the current practice is warranted.

High contact areas include: door handles, hand rails, elevators, push plates, light switches, bathroom areas, etc. Enhanced cleaning includes cleaning with stronger disinfectant cleaner consistent with the advice of public health officials.

Ministries should continue to consider videoconferences, teleconferences or e-mail communication as an alternative to face-to-face meetings.

### **Q7. Can the virus be transmitted through the handling of paper products?**

**A.** Public Health Ontario has been closely monitoring reports and publications on COVID-19, and there are no reports of transmission through handling paper products. It is however recommended that employees continue to practice proper hand hygiene at all times.

### **Q8. Can I request local cleaners to provide additional cleaning for my work space?**

**A.** Local cleaners are responsible for following consistent standards for the appropriate cleaning of their building. Employees should not be directing local cleaners on how to perform their services.

### **Q9. I am in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19. What should I do?**

**A.** If you are in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or who has been directed by public health to self isolate, please visit the government's COVID-19 [website](#), to use the COVID-19 self-assessment tool and go get tested. Information on Assessment Centres can also be found on the government's COVID-19 website.

If you receive direction from medical authorities to seek further assessment or self-isolate, please self-isolate immediately and notify your manager. If you remain asymptomatic and it is not feasible to work remotely while self-isolating, you may request a 14-day paid leave of absence.

### **Q10. Is there a definition of a "close contact"?**

**A.** A close contact is defined as a person who provided care for the patient. This includes healthcare workers, family members or other caregivers, or those who had other similar close physical contact, or who lived with or otherwise had close

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prolonged contact with a person with a probable or confirmed case while the person was ill.

### **Q11. Why is so much attention being paid to hand hygiene?**

- A.** Public Health officials have indicated that frequent hand washing with soap and water is the best defense against common infectious diseases. Should soap and water not be readily available, employees are encouraged to use hand sanitizer with at least 60 to 90% alcohol.

### **Q12. Will the employer provide medical masks, gloves and hand sanitizers with at least 60 to 90% alcohol? (UPDATED)**

- A.** Most OPS employees are not required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE). According to Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, use of surgical/procedure (medical) masks is generally not recommended for non-healthcare workers, particularly during this time when non-healthcare settings are being asked to transfer any PPE that is not needed. However, based on a workplace risk assessment, your employer will determine the need for PPE based on the circumstances of the workplace and the nature of the services provided. Inquire with your manager if you are unsure if PPE is required for your workplace.

To reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses, including coronaviruses, the Chief Medical Officer of Health is reminding Ontarians to:

- wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 to 90% alcohol
- sneeze and cough into your sleeve
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- avoid contact with people who are sick
- stay at home if you are sick
- practice physical distancing

### **Q13. I understand that face coverings (non-medical masks) may be an effective measure in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Should I wear one? (UPDATED)**

- A.** The best way to protect yourself is to:
- stay home except for essential reasons
  - practice physical distancing
  - wash your hands frequently (using alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 to 90% alcohol if soap and water are not available)
  - practice proper cough and sneeze etiquette (for example, sneeze and cough into your sleeve and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth)

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Although face coverings will not protect you from COVID-19, the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health experts are recommending that individuals wear a face covering to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in areas where physical distancing may be challenging or not possible, such as public transit.

For more information about use of face coverings (non-medical masks) to prevent the spread of COVID-19, visit [MOH's Face Coverings and Face Masks webpage](#).

Face coverings can be worn for the purpose of source control to prevent the wearer from spreading the virus to others. They are not tested to a recognized standard and have not been proven to protect the person wearing it from becoming infected. If worn, they must be cleaned or disposed of properly.

There is no requirement to wear a face covering in an OPS workplace, as other control measures would be put in place based on a risk assessment. Please note that face coverings (non-medical masks) are not PPE and is not a replacement for PPE.

### **Q14. Are visitors at OPS workplaces/buildings required to wear face coverings? (NEW)**

- A. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, health officials have been advising the public to follow public health advice and wash their hands often, stay at home if feeling ill, and practice physical distancing by staying at least two meters apart from anyone outside their household.

Now that the province is reopening, the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health experts are recommending that individuals wear a face covering (non-medical mask) where physical distancing is not possible, to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. These recommendations are mostly applicable to environments where physical distancing is a challenge, such as public transit or in a small grocery store or pharmacy.

Visitors who enter OPS workplaces/buildings are encouraged to follow all provincial public health recommendations, including hand-hygiene, physical distancing and wearing a face covering if physical distancing is not possible.

If you have any concerns, speak to your manager/supervisor.

### **Q15. I am anxious about the possibility of contracting COVID-19. What should I do?**

- A. The Secretary of Cabinet has reiterated that the OPS will only be asking employees to attend the workplace in-person, where a ministry requires them to

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deliver critical services. Where operationally feasible, OPS employees that support non-critical services have been asked to work remotely.

Given the nature of some services government delivers, working remotely may not always be achievable, and in those circumstances, employees will be asked to remain at home until further notice.

We understand that this situation may cause staff concern about potential health risks in our province. Our integrated health care system is well prepared to manage this situation. Ontario officials are actively working with partners in the health care system at the municipal, provincial and federal levels to monitor, detect and contain this emerging health issue in the province.

To reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses, including coronaviruses, remember to:

- wash your hands often with soap and water
- sneeze and cough into your sleeve
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- avoid contact with people who are sick
- stay home if you are sick
- practice physical distancing

As you may know the Federal Government has encouraged:

- all Canadian travellers to return to Canada
- all Canadians to avoid non-essential travel out of the country, including to the United States, until further notice.

Further restrictions were placed on international flights entering Canada, limiting access to a handful of airports across the country. It was also announced that borders will be closed – and entry denied - to everyone except Canadian citizens, permanent residents, family members of citizens, air crews, diplomats and U.S. citizens travelling on essential matters. In addition, anyone showing symptoms will not be allowed to board domestic flights or trains.

The OPS is doing everything it can help to ensure our workplace remains safe. We have implemented remote working and physical distancing practices as a precaution, so we can do our part to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19.

For the latest information on COVID-19, please visit the government's [website](#), where you can also find a COVID-19 self-assessment tool and information on Assessment Centres.



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For more information related to physical distancing and community-based measures, please visit the Government of Canada [website](#).

Resources are also available through the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#).

### **Q16. What should I do if I think I have symptoms of COVID-19? (UPDATED)**

- A.** Symptoms range from common to severe respiratory illness. A complete list of symptoms can be found in the [COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms](#) which is available on the [Ministry of Health website](#).

If you think you have symptoms you should immediately self-isolate and conduct a self-assessment on [Ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus) and go get tested. If required, contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or your primary care provider.

Be sure to mention your symptoms and your travel history, including the countries you visited.

If you need immediate medical attention, call 911 and let the operator know of your travel history as well as your symptoms.

### **Q17. What should I do if I am diagnosed as having COVID-19?**

- A.** If you have been confirmed by a health care provider to have COVID-19, you must remain at home and inform your manager. Your health care provider can also help you connect with your local public health unit for information on how to self-isolate and other directions.

### **Q18. Will the government be implementing any enhanced cleaning in the buildings occupied by the OPS across the province?**

- A.** Appropriate cleaning continues to be undertaken to reduce risk to staff and visitors within OPS occupied buildings. The current cleaning practice is to help ensure a hygienic workplace is maintained. Environmentally friendly cleaning products that are effective at reducing the spread of bacteria and viruses are used.

In addition, MGCS is coordinating with Infrastructure Ontario and ministry CAO's on the delivery of enhanced cleaning of all high contact areas at least three additional times per day at certain OPS occupied locations in circumstances where cleaning above the current practice is warranted.

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High contact areas include: door handles, hand rails, elevators, push plates, light switches, bathroom areas, etc. Enhanced cleaning includes cleaning with stronger disinfectant cleaner consistent with the advice of public health officials.

### **Q19. I saw a cleaning staff person wearing a mask and gloves. What's happening in my building?**

- A.** Enhanced cleaning using a strong disinfectant has begun within some buildings where the circumstances have warranted. The janitorial staff conducting the cleaning are required to work with these chemicals for long periods at a time. As a result, they have been provided with personal protective equipment to wear while performing these extended activities.

### **Q20. What are my responsibilities as an employee in the context of COVID-19?**

- A.** Employees have the responsibility to review information provided by health authorities and by their employer. They are responsible for following their management's direction regarding reporting to work and workplace health procedures in the context of COVID-19.

While at work, employees must also report to the employer any issue or circumstance in a workplace that is likely to be hazardous to the health or safety of employees or other persons granted access to the workplace by the employer. This includes bringing to the attention of their manager any circumstances where it is suspected that a client might be ill.

To avoid spreading the virus to colleagues and clients, employees who have symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough and difficulty breathing) should get tested and stay at home while they are showing symptoms or as directed by public health.

## **Racism and Harassment**

### **Q21. I am working with the public during COVID-19. What can I do if I experience racism or other forms of discrimination and/or harassment on the job? (NEW)**

- A.** Racism, discrimination and harassment of any kind are unacceptable in the Ontario Public Service (OPS), and in Ontario.

As we continue to feel the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's critical to remember that worry and fear can fuel racism and hate in the workplace, which are already serious threats to the safety, health, and prosperity of our organization and society.

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Individuals, workers and families who are racialized, Indigenous and/or belong to other underrepresented groups such as persons with disabilities, are particularly vulnerable to negative impacts of the pandemic, such as racist actions, harassment and discrimination in public and on the job.

As public servants we have a responsibility to address racism and foster a respectful, safe and inclusive workplace. The Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Prevention (WDHP) Office supports managers and employees to achieve effective responses to complaints of alleged workplace discrimination and harassment in the OPS.

Through the [OPS Respectful Workplace Policy](#), the OPS is committed to achieving and maintaining an inclusive, respectful, and racially equitable workplace that is free from discrimination and harassment.

Under the [Occupational Health and Safety Policy](#), every public servant has a duty to immediately report concerns to their manager/supervisor, including unsafe acts or conditions, personal fitness to work safely, workplace violence or harassment and any work-related injury, incident or occupational illness.

If you have a concern about workplace harassment or discrimination, talk to your manager/supervisor or the next level manager (the manager's manager) not involved in the issue. All employees are responsible for respecting the dignity and rights of other employees, other workers and the public you serve and for not engaging in harassment or discrimination in the workplace.

Managers have a duty under the [OPS Respectful Workplace Policy](#) to advise their team and members of the public, as applicable, including visitors to OPS facilities or individuals conducting business with the government, that they are expected to be respectful and not harass or discriminate against employees, and other members of the public. This includes interactions which are in person, over the telephone or electronically.

In addition, the OPS Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) offers confidential, toll-free assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the dedicated Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Prevention (WDHP) information line at 1-877-298-8851.

As Ontarians and as public servants, it is our collective responsibility to call out racism, discrimination, and harassment when we witness it – to speak up and reject it. Every employee has a role to play in creating and sustaining an inclusive and accessible workplace that is a safe place for people of all races and religions.

We are all in this together. Our collective dedication to providing high-quality critical public services during this unprecedented crisis, as well as calling out

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racism, discrimination, and all forms of harassment, will contribute to building a safe, inclusive, and equitable workplace.

During these extraordinary times, the OPS is committed to leading by example in advancing equity. Now more than ever, we need to stick together as one OPS.

### Travel

#### **Q22. I have upcoming travel scheduled outside of Canada and I'm still considering travelling. What should I do?**

**A.** The Federal Government has encouraged:

- all Canadian travelers to return to Canada
- all Canadians to avoid non-essential travel out of the country, including to the United States, until further notice.

On March 16, 2020, further restrictions were placed on international flights entering Canada, limiting access to a handful of airports across the country. It was also announced that borders will be closed – and entry denied - to everyone except Canadian citizens, permanent residents, family members of citizens, air crews, diplomats and U.S. citizens travelling on essential matters.

All OPS employees are advised not to travel internationally (including for personal travel), pending further direction.

If you must travel for essential reasons, you are strongly encouraged to review the Federal Government's travel health notices associated with [COVID-19 here](#).

#### **Q23. I recently travelled outside of Canada and have returned to Ontario. Should I go into self-isolation?**

**A.** All employees (including healthcare workers and essential service workers) must undergo a mandatory 14-day self-isolation when returning from traveling outside of the country, whether they are experiencing symptoms or not.

Where an employee is returning from international travel, and:

- is not exhibiting symptoms, and
- is available to work:
  - Please work remotely, if operationally feasible
  - When it's not operationally feasible to work remotely, request a paid leave to your manager for the 14-day self-isolation period.

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As a result of these measures, all OPS employees are advised not to travel internationally (including for personal travel), pending further direction.

If employees have travelled outside of Canada (including the United States) and experience any symptoms within 14 days, they should conduct a self-assessment on [Ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus) and get tested. If required, contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or your primary care provider.

Should an employee become ill, Short-Term Sickness Plan (STSP) or attendance credits should be used.

**Q24. I have been advised to go into COVID-19 related self-isolation due to recent travel history, but do not have any symptoms. How will my absences be covered?**

**A.** All employees (including healthcare workers and essential service workers) must undergo a 14-day self-isolation when returning from traveling outside of the country, whether they are experiencing symptoms or not.

Where an employee is returning from international travel, and:

- is not exhibiting symptoms, and
- is available to work:
  - Please work remotely, if operationally feasible
  - When it's not operationally feasible to work remotely, request a paid leave to your manager for the 14-day self-isolation period.

As a result of these measures, all OPS employees are advised not to travel internationally (including for personal travel), pending further direction.

If employees have travelled outside of Canada (including the United States) and experience any symptoms within 14 days, they should conduct a self-assessment on [Ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus) and get tested. If required, contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or your primary care provider.

Should you become ill, Short-Term Sickness Plan (STSP) or attendance credits should be used.

## Absence Requests

**Q25. I need to take time off to attend to a child or other family members who have been directed to self-isolate, or are awaiting testing for COVID-19, or confirmed to have COVID-19. How will that absence be treated?**

**A.** If you need to take time off to take care of a child or other family members who have been directed to self-isolate, are awaiting testing or confirmed to have

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COVID-19, where possible, please work with your manager to review alternate work arrangements, including remote work. If remote work is not operationally feasible due to the nature of your position, you may request to use accumulated credits, unpaid leave or special and compassionate leave requests which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by your manager.

### **Q26. I am a Canadian Forces Reservist and I would like to request a military/reservist leave. How are those requests being treated?**

- A.** Unpaid leaves of absence for military/reservist leave requests will be granted so long as the employee is not exempt from Part XIV (Leaves of Absence) of the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA). The eligibility requirements under s. 50.2(1) and (3) of the ESA must also be met. These requirements include:
- An employee is a reservist and is deployed to a Canadian Forces operation (pre-deployment and post-deployment activities are considered part of the operation); and
  - The employee has been employed by the employer for at least six months.

If Part XIV of the Act does not apply to the employee (e.g. for police officers), or the employee has not been employed by the employer for at least six months, requests may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and granted where operationally feasible.

## **Attendance**

### **Q27. Do I have to provide a medical note or evidence of a positive COVID-19 test? (NEW)**

- A.** Medical notes or evidence of positive COVID-19 tests are not required. The Employer will temporarily suspend requests for medical information used to substantiate all short-term sickness absences from the workplace due to illness and or injury, unless abuse is suspected.

### **Q28. Do I have to provide a medical note to return to work? (NEW)**

- A.** A medical clearance note to return to work is not required for employees who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, although employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who have been ordered to self-isolate cannot return to work unless instructed by public health that they are medically cleared to return to work.

For typical employment accommodation/return to work plans (for example, an employee who is scheduled to return from an extended STSP leave or from LTIP), medical clearance will need to be obtained depending on individual cases.

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Employees are encouraged to speak with their manager if they have any questions/concerns about a return to work or accommodation needs.

**Q29. I can return to work, however I have medical restrictions and limitations; can I return to work with employment accommodation? (NEW)**

- A.** Employees returning to work are to provide medical restrictions and limitations to their manager. Your manager will work with you to identify appropriate employment accommodation solutions, on a case by case and individualized basis. If required, your manager may contact a Disability Accommodation Specialist or HRA for assistance with your case.

**Q30. How is a COVID-19 related absence treated in the Employee Attendance Support Program (EASP) and the Attendance Support Management Program (ASMP)? Will COVID-19 related absences be precluded? (NEW)**

- A.** The Employer will continue to administer the ASMP and EASP, with some temporary modifications. COVID-19 related absences will be precluded from the programs. Where the absence is not related to COVID-19, the ASMP and EASP will continue to apply.

**Q31. Why did I receive the EASP 'enterprise attendance threshold notification' email if COVID-19 related absences do not count towards the program? (NEW)**

- A.** This is an automatic email sent to managers and employees. Although COVID-19 related absences do not count towards the EASP program, they are entered into WIN as STSP, which may inadvertently trigger the automatic email. If you believe you received this email in error, talk to your manager. They will help you review your absences.

## Right to Refuse Unsafe Work

**Q32. I am concerned that by travelling to work on public transit, I may contract COVID-19. Do I have to report to work?**

- A.** The Secretary of Cabinet has reiterated that the OPS will only be asking employees to attend the workplace in-person, where a ministry requires them to deliver critical services. Precautions are being taken to help ensure our workplaces remain safe.

Where operationally feasible, OPS employees that support non-critical services have been asked to work remotely. All services that can be delivered remotely will continue. Employees who do not support critical services and who cannot

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work remotely will be asked to remain at home until further notice from the Employer.

For more information, please visit the government's [web page](#) where people can learn more about the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and stay informed through daily updates.

### **Q33. Do I have to report to work if I am concerned about being exposed to the COVID-19 virus in the workplace?**

**A.** The health and safety of our employees is a top priority for the Government of Ontario.

The Employer is doing everything it can to help ensure our workplace remains safe. We have implemented remote working and physical distancing practices as a precaution, so we can do our part to help prevent and control the spread of COVID-19.

The Secretary of Cabinet has reiterated that the OPS will continue to only be asking employees to attend the workplace in-person, where a ministry requires them to deliver critical services. Where operationally feasible, OPS employees that support non-critical services have been asked to work remotely. Given the nature of some services government delivers, working remotely may not always be achievable, and in those circumstances, employees will be asked to remain at home.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act governs the rights of workers to refuse work where they believe their health and safety is likely to be in danger.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, an employee can refuse to work if he or she has reason to believe that the physical condition of the workplace is likely to endanger the employee.

The OPS Occupational Health and Safety Policy also establishes the enterprise framework for occupational health and safety in the OPS. The policy provides strategic direction, including direction to ministries and Commission Public Bodies, regarding compliance with statutory requirements for occupational health and safety. This includes reporting and addressing unsafe acts and conditions, and potential and actual workplace hazards.

If you do have concerns about your safety at work, please talk to your manager.



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### Workers' Compensation

**Q34. If I contract COVID-19 as a result of exposure in the workplace, could that be covered under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act instead of STSP or other accumulated credits?**

**A.** The Workplace Safety and Insurance Act does not provide coverage for workers who are symptom-free even when in self-isolation or sent home on a precautionary basis. However, should a symptom-free worker develop symptoms or illness while in self-isolation as a result of workplace exposure, they may be eligible for WSIB benefits.

A worker is entitled to benefits for COVID-19 arising out of and in the course of the worker's employment. Claims for COVID-19 will be adjudicated on a case-by-case basis. In all cases, the WSIB will make a determination based on the merits of the case, taking into account all of the relevant facts and circumstances.

### Accommodation

**Q35. How are pregnant employees being accommodated during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**A.** Medical experts have advised that pregnant women are not considered to be at a greater risk; however, where employees are concerned about their risk of contracting COVID-19 in the workplace, they are encouraged to work with their manager to discuss such concerns.

The Employer is doing everything it can to help ensure our workplace remains safe. We have implemented remote working and physical distancing practices as a precaution, so we can do our part to help prevent and control the spread of COVID-19. You can review the most up to date information on the OPS [2019 Novel Coronavirus](#) website.

For the latest information on COVID-19, please visit the [government's website](#), where you can also find a COVID-19 self-assessment tool.

For more information related to physical distancing and community-based measures, please visit the [Government of Canada website](#).

Resources are also available through the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#).

**Q36. What should I do if I require accommodation to work from home?**

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR OPS EMPLOYEES RE: 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

- A. In accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, the OPS is committed to offering and providing timely and effective employment accommodation to employees with illnesses, injuries or disabilities. This duty continues to apply when employees are required to work from home. For guidance on employment accommodation please speak to your manager. You can also refer to the [Disability Accommodation Policy](#) or contact your Disability Accommodation Specialist, Centre for Employee Health Safety and Wellness.

### **Q37. How does the current COVID-19 situation impact accommodations?**

- A. The OPS remains committed to providing effective employment accommodation to our employees who have disabilities. The health, safety and dignity of all members of the OPS is paramount.

It's important to note that despite the unusual circumstances caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the accommodation process has not changed. As accommodation issues are to be addressed on a case by case, individualized basis, employees are encouraged to speak to their manager regarding their employment accommodation needs. The Centre for Employee Health, Safety and Wellness continues to support managers and their employees in developing effective employment accommodation solutions.

### **Q38. I am in a position which has been deemed critical however I have concerns with childcare due to the closure of schools and licensed child care centres. What should I do?**

- A. For OPS staff with children, it can be challenging to balance work and family responsibilities with the closure of:
- all provincially funded and private schools
  - all licensed child care centres.

If you are not able to make alternate child care arrangements, please work with your manager to review alternate work arrangements, including remote work.

If remote work is not operationally feasible due to the nature of your position, special and compassionate leave requests will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by your manager.

The province has recently allowed select licensed childcare centres to open to provide health care and other frontline workers, including doctors, nurses, paramedics, firefighters, police, and correctional officers, with access to safe, local emergency child care. These child care centres will be required to follow existing health and safety requirements and have a plan in place should any staff, children or parents be exposed to the virus.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR OPS EMPLOYEES RE: 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

A list of reopened child care centres is now posted on the [Ministry of Health website](#).

**Q39. I'm in a position which cannot be done remotely and is deemed critical. I'm concerned that I'm at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19, as I have a pre-existing medical condition. What steps should/can I take, to better protect myself?**

**A.** Medical experts have advised that some individuals are at greater risk of infections and developing severe complications from COVID-19.

Vulnerable populations may include anyone who is:

- an older adult
- at risk due to underlying medical conditions (e.g. heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, cancer, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries)
- at risk due to a compromised immune system from a medical condition, disability or treatment (e.g. chemotherapy)

The OPS is taking steps to continue to provide public services while leveraging alternative work arrangements where operationally feasible. It is important that OPS employees work from home unless it is critical for them to remain in the workplace to maintain delivery of services.

If you are a person who is at greater risk of contracting COVID-19, and you are in a position where you are required to report to the workplace in-person to maintain delivery of critical services, please speak with your manager about requesting a leave of absence to support your time away from work.

**Q40. If I'm over seventy years old or have a compromised immune system and I am concerned that I am at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19, what should I do? (UPDATED)**

**A.** Medical experts have advised that some individuals are at greater risk of infections and developing severe complications from COVID-19, including older adults.

It is important to note that Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health urged all individuals over the age of seventy years old or who have a compromised immune system to self-isolate.

The OPS is taking steps to continue to provide public services while leveraging alternative work arrangements where operationally feasible. It is important that OPS employees work from home unless it is critical for them to remain in the workplace to maintain delivery of services.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR OPS EMPLOYEES RE: 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

If you are a person who is at greater risk of contracting COVID-19, and you are in a position where you are required to report to the workplace in-person to maintain delivery of critical services, please speak with your manager about requesting a leave of absence to support your time away from work.

### Telework

#### **Q41. What can I do to ensure that my workspace at home is ergonomically correct while I am teleworking? (NEW)**

Teleworkers should use the [Health and Safety Telework Checklist for Home Offices](#) to self-assess their home office and raise any concerns with their manager. A tip sheet on [Ergonomics for Working at Home](#) and additional resources and training on workplace ergonomics are available on the Centre for Employee Health Safety and Wellness' [Ergonomics webpage](#) on InsideOPS.

#### **Q42. Who pays for expenses related to telework? (e.g. internet, special chair or other equipment)? (NEW)**

A. The employer is responsible for covering the costs of standard issued IT required for telework (e.g. laptop, mobile phone, VPN, etc.). Where employees are seeking additional reimbursement for expenses incurred that may be associated with the direction to work from home, it is recommended they speak with their managers.

#### **Q43. I have been teleworking since March 2020, will I be able to deduct expenses for use of a workspace in my home from next year's taxes?**

A: An employee who has been teleworking **may** be able to deduct expenses paid in the 2020 tax year for the employment use of a work space in their home, as long as Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) requirements are met.

As with any tax issue, when you are preparing your 2020 tax return you should consult with a qualified personal tax advisor or the CRA for more information on allowable employment expenses (online at <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency.html>, through local tax services office, or the CRA's General Enquiries Line at 1-800-959-8281). For additional information on the current (2019) rules for deducting employment expenses, please see [CRA guide T4044, Employment Expenses](#).

### Employee and Family Assistance Program

#### **Q44. What Employee Assistance supports are available if I have concerns related to COVID-19?**

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR OPS EMPLOYEES RE: 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

- A.** Every employee has access to an Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP 1-844-880-9142). These programs provide confidential counselling and deal with a wide variety of personal problems, including stress, anxiety, or any other issues that may affect your well-being. The services of the EFAP continue to be available to you and your immediate family. For more information about the services offered by your EFAP, ask your manager or contact your Human Resources Services Branch or visit your Ministry's intranet site.

For the latest information, the government has set up a web page where people can [learn more about the 2019 novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and stay informed](#) through daily updates.

### Out-of-Country Benefits Plan

#### **Q45. Will my coverage in the Out-of-Country benefits plan continue?**

- A.** Yes, coverage for OPS employees and their eligible dependent(s) who have elected to enrol in the Optional Upgrade plans (OUP), that include Emergency Out-of-Country medical coverage and Emergency Travel Assistance/Global Medical Assistance continues to apply. Claims related to the novel coronavirus or claims that occurred during travel to a country with travel advisory warnings will be treated like any other claim under your plan. Please refer to the brochure posted on the Total Compensation Strategies Branch page at InsideOPS or you may contact the insurance carrier directly at:

*Manulife - OPSEU represented employees*

Phone: 1-800-268-6195

Website: [www.manulife.ca](http://www.manulife.ca)

*Canada Life (formerly Great-West Life) - All Other Employees*

Phone: 1-800-874-5899

Website: [www.canadalife.com](http://www.canadalife.com)

### Fixed-Term Employees

#### **Q46. I am a fixed-term employee who recently travelled abroad and have been advised to go into mandatory COVID-19 related self-isolation but am not symptomatic. How will my absences be covered?**

- A.** All employees (including healthcare workers and essential service workers) are now being asked to undergo a mandatory 14-day self-isolation when returning from traveling outside of the country, whether they are experiencing symptoms or not.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR OPS EMPLOYEES RE: 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Where an employee is returning from international travel, and:

- is not exhibiting symptoms, and
- is available to work:
  - Please work remotely, if operationally feasible
  - When it's not operationally feasible to work remotely, request a paid leave to your manager for the 14-day self-isolation period.

As a result of these measures, all OPS employees are advised not to travel internationally (including for personal travel), pending further direction.

If employees have travelled outside of Canada (including the United States) and experience any symptoms within 14 days, they should conduct a self-assessment on [Ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus) and get tested. If required, contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or your primary care provider.

Should an employee become ill, attendance credits should be used.

### **Q47. What should I do if I have been diagnosed as having COVID-19?**

- A.** If you have been confirmed to have COVID-19, you should stay at home and use attendance credits while you recover and are instructed by public health that you are medically cleared to return to work. You should also remain in regular contact with your manager.

## **Critical Services**

### **Q48. How are critical services defined in the OPS?**

- A.** Critical / Time-critical services are defined in each ministry's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) as services that need to be operated continuously or need to be operational within one week.

Generally, time critical services are defined as:

- Delivery of services to the public that affect their health, life and safety
- Delivery of services to clients that affect their health, life and safety
- Emergency management services in all ministries
- Government services that seek to prevent the destruction or serious deterioration of government assets
- Government services whose disruption could lead to environmental damage
- Government services that affect the administration of justice
- Government services necessary to meet mandatory legal requirements to deliver a time-critical service

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- Government services necessary to avoid a significant financial impact on the economy
- Services that protect the reputation of, and confidence in, Government

These critical services may vary across ministries depending on the mandate and objectives of each ministry. Deputy Ministers will communicate their critical services within their organizations.

### **Q49 Why is the Government switching to critical services now?**

- A.** Following the government's order for the mandatory closure of all non-essential businesses in the province, the OPS has taken action to align with these efforts and move to critical services only, while continuing to operate non-critical services remotely.

Where operationally feasible, OPS employees have been asked to work remotely. Given the nature of some services government delivers, working remotely may not always be achievable. In these circumstances, precautions are being taken to help ensure our workplaces remain safe.

### **Q50. Are employees required to attend the workplace if they deliver a critical service?**

- A.** Yes, where a critical service cannot be performed remotely, employees are still expected to attend the workplace in person.

Where operational circumstances permit, the way in which those services are delivered may also be temporarily changed in consideration of the evolving COVID-19 situation. Any changes will continue to be communicated as updates become available.

### **Q51. What is the Government doing to ensure the health and safety of employees delivering critical services?**

- A.** The health and safety of our employees is a top priority.

Where operationally feasible, OPS employees have been asked to work remotely. Given the nature of some services government delivers, working remotely may not always be achievable. In these circumstances, precautions are being taken to help ensure our workplaces remain safe.

Physical distancing is essential to protecting our health and the health of others and restricting the spread of the virus. It is important that OPS employees work from home unless it is critical for them to remain in the workplace to maintain delivery of services.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR OPS EMPLOYEES RE: 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Appropriate cleaning continues to be undertaken to reduce risk to staff and visitors within OPS occupied buildings. The current cleaning practice is to help ensure a hygienic workplace is maintained. Environmentally friendly cleaning products that are effective at reducing the spread of bacteria and viruses are used.

In addition, MGCS is coordinating with Infrastructure Ontario and ministry CAO's on the delivery of enhanced cleaning of all high contact areas at least three additional times per day at certain OPS occupied locations, in circumstances where cleaning above the current practice is warranted.

High contact areas include: door handles, hand rails, elevators, push plates, light switches, bathroom areas, etc. Enhanced cleaning includes cleaning with stronger disinfectant cleaner consistent with the advice of public health officials.

### **Q52. Will the Government still deliver non-critical services?**

- A.** All services (critical or otherwise) that can be delivered remotely will continue. Employees who do not support critical services and who cannot work remotely will be asked to remain at home.

### **Q53. Will employees that deliver non-critical services that can't work remotely be compensated?**

- A.** Yes, employees with regularly scheduled hours who do not support critical services, and who cannot work remotely, will be asked to remain at home on paid leave.