



March 12, 2020

Urgent memo to Unifor health care members regarding COVID-19

Unifor makes worker safety a top priority and as such is calling on the federal and provincial governments to dedicate resources to the protection of all health care workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

In particular, the union is advising governments to uphold the precautionary principle when it comes to providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers. As outlined by Justice Campbell following the SARS crisis in 2003, the precautionary principle says that in the absence of scientific certainty on how an illness is spread, we must err on the side of caution and protect workers.

Even the best available science on how COVID-19 is spread is, at this stage, uncertain and in some cases conflicting. Knowing these uncertainties, it is the government's responsibility to provide you with PPE like fit-tested, NIOSH-approved N95 respirators, or powered air-purifying respirators and ensure other care and controls are in place to protect you.

The union is particularly concerned with long-term care workers due to chronic under-staffing and the common practice of working in multiple facilities, which would increase the risk of exposure for both workers and residents. Older persons remain the highest risk group for COVID-19 and long-term care workers will be under added stress and personal and mental health risk if COVID-19 reaches their residents.

You have rights at work and these rights are there to protect you even in difficult times like these when exceptional measures may need to be taken. Here are some recommended steps you can take to protect yourself and others:

- Stay at home and self-isolate if you are feeling ill. This is vital to preventing the spread of COVID-19 through communities and health centres.
- Get [updates from the Government of Canada](#) as an official source of the latest knowledge on COVID-19, including their advice particularly [directed at health professionals](#).
- If you are concerned about lost income due to self-isolation, contact Service Canada to apply for Employment Insurance (EI). [Special modifications have been made to EI](#) to waive the one-week waiting period and increase eligibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Request a copy of your employer's pandemic policy or protocol.
- Report any health and safety concerns to your supervisor or manager copying your Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee and your union.
- If you have not been provided appropriate personal protective equipment, if the equipment is ill-fitting, or you have not been trained in proper use, stop and speak with management immediately.
- If you are unsure of any directives given by your employer, contact your union.

As health care workers, you ensure the health and proper care of your patients and residents and this quality care can only be provided if the work is done to keep you safe and healthy.

Your union appreciates and values the work you do each day to keep people safe and healthy. We are working diligently to extend that same care and protection to you.

Unifor will continue to provide updates as information becomes available at unifor.org/COVID-19. Please sign up for the union's weekly newsletter at unifor.org/subscribe and download the Unifor mobile app on the Google Play store or the Apple App Store on your smartphone.

Additional resources can be found here:

NATIONAL

[Government of Canada Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) disease information page](#)

[Unifor Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Fact Sheet](#)

[Jerry Dias letter to Minister of Labour Filomena Tassi requesting emergency supports for workers in workplaces affected by COVID-19](#)

ONTARIO

[Media release: Unifor urges Ottawa to proactively protect workers from COVID-19 virus](#)

[Ontario Health COVID-19 information and resources including contact information for local public health units](#)

NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia Health Authority COVID-19 Guidelines for Health Care Workers (available on NSHA intranet)