

City of Hamilton Employee COVID-19 Question & Answer



The City of Hamilton continues to closely monitor the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) in collaboration with the Public Health Department and the Province of Ontario.

What precautions is the City taking in protecting City staff? (updated March 14, 2020)

All levels of government are monitoring the global coronavirus situation and have taken measures to ensure public health readiness at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. Here in Hamilton, our Public Health, Hamilton Paramedic Service, Human Resources staff, local hospitals, post-secondary institutions and the Ministry of Health are all working together to monitor the situation and taking all the necessary steps to be fully prepared for any appropriate responses. Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting procedures are in place for all open City facilities.

What if employees have pre-scheduled staff training and conferences? (updated March 14, 2020)

- All in-person, non-essential training attended or hosted by City staff between now and April 30, 2020 is cancelled.
- All in-person staff attendance at conferences or professional development activities between now and April 30, 2020 are cancelled, and all City-hosted conferences or professional development activities between now and April 30, 2020 are cancelled.
- Staff are also asked not to book any public meetings or events until further notice.
- Staff are not required to attend any public meetings hosted by external partners or City of Hamilton Advisory Committee meetings.

How can City staff stop the spread of COVID-19? (updated March 14, 2020)

There are some things that we can all do to be diligent in our workplaces to prevent the spread of all types of respiratory illnesses, including the flu.

Public Health advises:

- washing your hands often with soap and water
- avoiding close contact with people who are sick

- covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze; if you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm
- avoid touching your face, eyes and mouth to prevent illness
- cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces, and
- getting the flu shot, if you haven't already done so

What City occupations are at a greater risk of exposure for contracting COVID-19? (updated March 14, 2020)

Employees having greater contact with the general public, health workers providing care and / or services in the community will be at greater risk of exposure for the virus. The risk may be higher for certain aerosol generating medical procedures (e.g. intubation, suctioning, etc.).

Can employees refuse to work if they are concerned that they may be exposed to the COVID-19 virus? (updated March 14, 2020)

The work refusal provisions under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and our corporate procedure for refusing unsafe work will remain in force during a pandemic. However, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) may not have the necessary resources available during a pandemic emergency to respond to refusals. As per the legislation, a MOL inspector is not required to attend the workplace in person in order to rule as to whether or not the circumstances surrounding a work refusal is likely or not likely to endanger a worker.

In those cases where the MOL has been notified of an ongoing work refusal, and have indicated that they cannot respond forthwith, the City will take its direction from the MOL on whether to await an investigation, postpone the MOL intervention or abandon the work refusal.

Note: In order to exercise their right to refuse unsafe work under the OHSA, a worker must first report to their workplace and notify their supervisor that they are refusing to work. The work refusal procedure will not apply to a worker who phones from home and refuses to report to work because they believe it is unsafe.

What options are available to staff in order to reduce exposure to large groups? (updated March 14, 2020)

Employees are encouraged to adopt the personal infection control recommendations outlined in this document. As well as focusing on the use of any alternative arrangements, including social distancing, WebEx conferencing, conference calls, email, etc.

What options are available for employees that would like to work from home? (updated March 14, 2020)

During this time, the City of Hamilton's [Flexible Work Arrangement policy](#) and [Telecommuting Policy](#) and [Procedures](#) will be relaxed on a temporary basis. Staff should note that the Information Technology division is currently working to increase capacity for VPN, but it may not be available for staff that do not already have this capacity. Employees interested in working from home should do so only after consultation with their direct Supervisor to determine operational feasibility. Supervisors are being directed to exercise flexibility and discretion in approving flexible work arrangements, subject to continuing to meet operational requirements and expected service levels.

What can staff do if they suspect that one of their co-workers are displaying symptoms that could be related to the virus and they feel at risk? (updated March 14, 2020)

Employees should not speculate on the health of co-workers. Employees are encouraged to adopt the personal infection control recommendations outlined in this document.

Is the City of Hamilton providing hand sanitizer to employees? (updated March 14, 2020)

Hand washing with soap and water is the single most important infection prevention and control practice. Hand sanitizers provide an important backup to hand washing as part of an overall hand hygiene program. Where hand washing facilities are not available or easily accessed due to work demands, departments are encouraged to provide employees with alcohol-based hand sanitizers so they can protect themselves.

It is not necessary to require the public to use the hand sanitizer but it could be available for their use as well. It is more important that employees take the necessary steps to protect themselves including frequent hand washing, coughing into their sleeves and staying home if they are sick. Currently, hand sanitizers are in short supply and our supplier, Staples Canada, is limiting requests to healthcare settings only.

Note: Hand sanitizers should not be used to clean soiled hands. Noticeably dirty hands must be washed using soap and water.

What cleaning practices are recommended during this time? (updated March 14, 2020)

Common surfaces and commonly used items such as phones and shared keyboards should be kept clean and disinfected.

Employees are reminded that our cleaners will not touch or move anything on any work surface. Everyone is encouraged to clear all work surfaces at the end of the work day. If you have any questions regarding cleaning in your area, please contact Facilities or record your concerns on the site janitorial cleaning logbook.

Should staff be wearing a mask or respirator at work? (updated March 14, 2020)

There is no evidence to suggest that wearing masks will prevent the spread of infection in the general population. Improper use of masks may in fact increase the risk of infection. Masks do not act as an effective barrier against disease when they are worn for extended periods of time. In addition, removing your mask incorrectly can spread virus to your hands and face.

N95 respirators are only required by healthcare workers where there is potential exposure to patients with confirmed or suspected respiratory illness.

Departments/divisions in conjunction with Health, Safety and Wellness Specialists and JHSCs need to assess the risk of exposure and use the results to make informed decisions about the appropriate infection control measures and procedures, personal protective equipment, education and training.

If you are a healthy individual, the use of a mask is not recommended for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Wearing a mask when you are not ill may give a false sense of security. There is a potential risk of infection with improper mask use and disposal. They also need to be changed frequently.

However, your health care provider may recommend you wear a mask if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 while you are seeking or waiting for care. In this instance, masks are an appropriate part of infection prevention and control measures. The mask acts as a barrier and helps stop the tiny droplets from spreading you when you cough or sneeze.

Time off work for other reasons

Employees may require time off during this time for various reasons. This could be to take care of children due to the closure of schools from March 14 to April 6, 2020, or to take care of an immediate family member who is ill. (updated March 14, 2020)

During this time, greater flexibility will be given to employees for time off, subject to operational requirements. This time off could include the use of vacation allowance, lieu time, flex time or telecommuting.

What type of leave can an employee use if their child or an immediate family member is sick and they need to stay home to care for them? (updated March 14, 2020)

Employees have several options in this circumstance:

- Employees may be permitted to request same day vacation, lieu or unpaid time off, or secure other acceptable forms of absence
- Employees are strongly encouraged to consider a back-up person who can provide care in case the main caregiver becomes sick or is otherwise unavailable.
- Additional assistance and time off may be granted under the Ontario Employment Standards Act. Leaves may include:
 - Family Medical Leave is unpaid, job-protected leave of up to twenty-eight (28) weeks in a 52 week period. Family medical leave is taken to provide care or support to certain family members and people who consider the employee to be like a family member in respect of whom a qualified health practitioner has issued a certificate stating that he or she has a serious illness with a **significant risk of death** occurring within a period of 26 weeks.
 - Family Caregiver Leave is unpaid, job protected leave of up to eight (8) weeks within a calendar year. Family Caregiver Leave is taken to provide care or support to a family member with a serious chronic or episodic medical condition.
 - Critical Illness Leave is up to 37 weeks of unpaid leave to care for or support a critically ill minor child, or 17 weeks to care for or support a critically ill adult family member.
 - Sick Leave is up to three days of unpaid leave in each calendar year due to employee illness, injury or medical emergency.
 - Family Responsibility Leave is up to three days in each calendar year due to the illness, injury, medical emergency or other urgent matter of a prescribed family member.

Closures, program cancellations and redeployment

What if the program that an employee works for has been cancelled or a facility is closed? (updated March 14, 2020)

During this time, if a City program is cancelled, all staff may be redeployed to another work area. Otherwise, subject to direction from a direct Supervisor, affected staff will not be required to report to work.

No employees will be laid-off at this time.

What happens to part-time employees during this time? (updated March 14, 2020)

All confirmed schedules will be honoured for part-time employees, and there will be no loss of income for confirmed shifts.

Can an employee refuse redeployment? (updated March 14, 2020)

Employees may be redeployed to positions within their skill capability to safely perform the work. Employees cannot refuse redeployment. This may include a different work location or other job duties.

Where a job requires certification, all reasonable efforts must be made to use qualified employees. Where tasks require timely completion for health and safety reasons, and no qualified employees are available, the manager or supervisor shall assign the most qualified person to complete the tasks, or perform such work themselves, until a qualified person is available.

At what point does the City begin to cancel home visits? (updated March 14, 2020)

Departments/divisions in conjunction with Health, Safety and Wellness Specialists and JHSCs need to assess the risk of exposure and use the results to make informed decisions about the appropriate infection control measures and procedures, personal protective equipment, education and training.

Some of the key indicators that should be used when making decisions on appropriate responses are:

- Disease severity (i.e., hospitalization and death rates) in the community
- Extent of disease (number of people who are sick) in the community
- Impact of disease on workforce populations that are vulnerable and at higher risk (e.g., pregnant women, employees with certain chronic medical conditions that put them at increased risk for complications of influenza)
- Other factors that may affect employees' ability to get to work, such as school dismissals or closures due to high levels of illness in children or school dismissals

- If severity increases, public health officials may recommend a variety of methods to reduce potential exposures. For more information watch for regular updates from the Public Health Agency of Ontario, as well as Public Health Services (Hamilton).

Sick leave

What if an employee who is at work becomes ill with suspected COVID-19? (updated March 14, 2020)

If an employee is exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, they should go home immediately to avoid spreading the illness to other staff members and clients receiving service or health care. They are required to contact their local Public Health Authority to report their illness and advise the City of Hamilton's Occupational Health Nurse at ext. 4726.

Can an employee claim sick time if they have already been pre-approved for vacation time? (updated March 14, 2020)

If an employee becomes sick but already has vacation time booked, they are to continue with their pre-approved vacation.

Is a supervisor obligated to tell staff that one of their co-workers has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19? (updated March 14, 2020)

Supervisors are not permitted to share this information. You can remind employees of the importance of practicing good hygiene to prevent illness.

If an employee contracts COVID-19 and suspects this was contracted in the workplace is it considered a WSIB claim? (updated March 14, 2020)

Employees have a right to claim a work-related illness with the WSIB. Accordingly, incident reporting procedures remain in effect. Such a claim is subject to adjudication by the WSIB which determines eligibility to compensation if the claim is substantiated.

Does an employee need to see a doctor and submit a sick absence form or doctor's note if they have a presumptive or confirmed case of COVID-19? (updated March 14, 2020)

Employees are required to contact their local Public Health Authority to report their illness and advise the City of Hamilton's Occupational Health Nurse at ext. 4726. With respect to obtaining a doctor's note, greater flexibility and discretion will be given to staff during this time for sick absences related to COVID-19.

Are staff paid if they are home due to being quarantined/self-isolating? (non-travel related) (updated March 14, 2020)

If an employee has been directed by Public Health Services, Telehealth Ontario, their doctor or any other healthcare professional that they are required to self-isolate, the employer will pay them for lost time related to the time away from work. They are also required to contact the City of Hamilton's Occupational Health Nurse at ext. 4726.

Employees who decide to self-isolate without medical direction to do so will need to discuss with their supervisor options for covering the time. Options could include working at home, using vacation time or taking unpaid leave of absence.

If an employee becomes totally disabled from attending work due to illness, they may qualify for sick benefits.

Are staff paid if they are home due to being quarantined/self-isolating? (travel related) (updated March 14, 2020)

In accordance with the recommendations from the Government of Canada and the Medical Officer of Health, at this time, all non-essential international travel should be avoided.

In order to support employees during this time of uncertainty, the City of Hamilton has established the following travel guidelines for staff:

Travel before March 13, 2020

Employees returning from international travel (including the US) before March 13, 2020, do not have to self isolate unless otherwise directed by a healthcare professional. Otherwise, employees are asked to self monitor for symptoms and advise the City of Hamilton's Occupational Health Nurse at ext. 4726 if any symptoms arise.

Travel from March 13 to March 22, 2020 (inclusive)

All employees are required to notify their Supervisor if they are travelling out of country. All international travel (including the US), must be reported to their Supervisor upon their return home.

Those employees returning from international travel, **must self-isolate and monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for a total of 14 calendar days from the date they return home.** This applies regardless of whether staff feel sick or not.

The time during this **14 calendar day self-isolation period will be paid**, and employees will not suffer any loss of income.

Prior to their return to work, such employees must advise the City of Hamilton's Occupational Health Nurse at ext. 4726.

Those employees that are feeling well enough and can work from home and should do so if operationally feasible after consultation with their Supervisor.

Travel from March 22 to April 30, 2020 (or until further notice)

All employees are required to notify their Supervisor if **they voluntarily choose to travel outside of Canada (including the US) for non-essential reasons.**

Employees returning from international travel, **must self-isolate and monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for a total of 14 calendar days from the date they return home.** This applies regardless of whether staff feel sick or not.

When making a decision about your non-essential travel plans, please consider that **time taken during the mandatory 14 calendar day self-isolation period will be required to be covered by either flex time, lieu time, vacation time or non-paid leave of absence.**

Such absences will not be employer paid.

Prior to their return to work, such employees must advise the City of Hamilton's Occupational Health Nurse at ext. 4726.

Those employees that are feeling well enough and can work from home and should do so if operationally feasible after consultation with their Supervisor.

Travel

Are employees obligated to tell their direct supervisor if they are travelling out of country? (updated March 14, 2020)

All employees are obligated to notify their direct supervisor if they are travelling out of country.

For full-time benefit eligible employees, and employees who have this coverage in accordance with their respective collective agreements, what effect will COVID-19 have on their travel insurance? (updated March 14, 2020)

For Emergency Out-of-province and Out-of-Canada insurance, when travelling, if you or a covered member of your family have a medical emergency and get sick (with COVID-19 or another illness), your Out-of-province/Out-of-Canada coverage will pay for your emergency medical treatments, subject to the terms of your contract.

If you or a family member experience a medical emergency and get sick while travelling and are quarantined (example: diagnosed with COVID-19), you would be eligible for coverage under your emergency Out-of-province/Out-of-Canada benefit, subject to the terms of your contract.

Please contact Manulife for more details at 1-800-268-6195.

Non-Union & HOWEA Only

If your Group Benefits insurance policy includes Emergency Travel Assistance, your Trip Interruption coverage will cover your costs for food, accommodations, and return transportation home (example: if you miss your originally scheduled flight), subject to the terms of your contract.

If you are placed in medical quarantine while travelling but are not sick or having a medical emergency, in the case where you have Emergency Travel Assistance, your plan would not provide any coverage for trip interruption costs. This is because Emergency Travel Assistance is intended to protect you if you have a medical emergency or get sick.

Call Allianz (1-800-363-1835) to confirm the best toll-free number to use from the country you're visiting. Keep it with you while travelling.

All Other Unions

Employees will be responsible for issuing payment for any eligible expenses directly to the health care provider. Once payment has been issued the claim can be submitted to Manulife for reimbursement.

Please refer to the Manulife FAQ updated as of March 10, 2020:

Group Benefits novel coronavirus [FAQ](#)

<https://www.manulife.ca/content/dam/manulife-advisor-portal/documents/en/other/gbrs/newsroom/manulife-gb-novel-coronavirus-faq.pdf>

Market Source [webpage](#)

<https://www.manulife.ca/advisors/group-benefits/newsroom/novel-coronavirus-precautions-for-your-clients-and-their-members.html>

Sponsor [webpage](#)

https://www.manulife.ca/content/consumer-portal/en_CA/business/news/group-benefits-news/coronavirus-precautions.html

All staff with concerns about the risk of COVID-19 in their workplace can contact Public Health Services at phscovid19@hamilton.ca, or 905-546-2424 ext. 7970.