

Important ETFO Update #2: Responding to COVID-19

March 26, 2020

In this update on COVID-19 related issues, you will find information regarding reaching out to students as well as the eligibility of pay for occasional teachers, WSIB benefits, pensions, loss of instructional time, maintaining personal mental health and other updates.

Stay informed at etfo.ca/link/covid19

Frequently Asked Questions

Is there an increase in racism and discrimination with the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes. With the COVID-19 affecting the health and well-being of humans globally, xenophobia and racist acts of discrimination and harassment towards ethnic groups are on the rise. Since the virus has been identified as originating in Wuhan, China, many people have targeted members of Asian ethnicities.

Members of these communities have reported experiencing increased racist acts with the onset of COVID-19, which is likely due to existing racist views, assumptions and unconscious biases of racialized people and groups, as well as stigma, fear, or being misinformed. One example is the U.S. President referring to the illness as the “[Chinese virus](#).” This misnomer reinforces a negative perception and stigma that further encourages racist ideologies and prejudices directed at a specific ethnic group.

This virus does not discriminate against specific ethnic groups and in difficult times, we all need to [raise our voices against stigma and discrimination](#).

Learn about COVID-19 and ways to prevent your health and well-being by referring to legitimate sources, such as the Government of Canada’s COVID-19 webpage at Canada.ca/Coronavirus.

My Principal has asked me and my DECE to reach out to our students to inquire about their wellness. Should I do this? I feel that I am not trained to make such an assessment.

School boards are taking time to develop plans and establish methods to deliver curriculum and explore a variety of ways on how educators may best connect with students/families around curriculum delivery.



At this time, members who are directed to reach out to families should connect on curriculum-related topics only. Ministry and school board approved online learning sites may be considered. Members should be wary of sharing sites with which they are unfamiliar.

School boards should be consulting with educators and union partners to explore how delivery models may be achieved. Boards must consider physical limitations, age limitations and the technical requirements that may be required by families and educators. Issues of equity must also be considered. Not all students have access to the internet or computers. Not all students have a learning style that is suited to online individual learning even if connectivity is available, and not all students will have parents or caregivers able support this learning.

Members should be using their board emails only and communication should be during normal working hours. Members must limit the conversation to topics related to learning. Members may ask families if they have accessed the Ministry's learning portal and if so, what activities did they find to be of interest, and/or what activities were most helpful?

While work environments may be changing in the short term, remember the onus is always on the educator to maintain professional boundaries in the workplace, even in a virtual workplace.

As an occasional teacher, I am concerned that I will not have a paycheque. What can I do to ensure that I have enough income to pay my bills?

On March 24, 2020, the Ministry of Education sent a letter to school boards, copied to all education sector unions that advised of the following:

1. Where occasional teachers or casual education workers were scheduled for work during the two-week school closure period, school boards are encouraged to pay these employees despite school board cancellation or other policies.
2. Where occasional teachers or casual education workers were not scheduled for work during the two-week school closure period, school boards are encouraged to provide salary continuance for the two-week school closure period utilizing their Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding to cover the costs that would have otherwise been expected to be incurred.
3. Based on precedent under the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, it is suggested that school boards look at the average earnings from the previous twelve weeks and pro-rate that for the two-week closure. Some school boards have already proceeded with similar measures, and in those circumstances, boards may not wish to change their methodology.
4. Should the closure period be extended, school boards are asked to follow their collective agreement obligations. For those whose income may still be interrupted by

the current extraordinary circumstances, the Ontario government is working with the Federal government on a range of supports.

When will members know if schools will remain closed beyond April 5?

ETFO is in regular communication with Ministry representatives during this closure. We have been advised today that a decision regarding the closure and the possibility of a further extension will be made early next week. The decision will be communicated by the Premier.

I am an occasional teacher and my board has been paying me an average of my days worked prior to the closure period. If schools remain closed after April 5 will my board continue to pay me?

During a teleconference call with ETFO on March 26, Ministry representatives informed us that, if the closure period is extended beyond April 5, Boards will be asking their casual employees to transition onto other income support programs (Employment Insurance) being implemented by the Federal Government during the pandemic. Members in this situation are strongly advised to seek out these support programs now for future income replacement. The information regarding EI special programs is as outlined below.

New Funds Available

The Federal government announced \$82 billion in aid for families and businesses during the pandemic. The new funds will be available in April for workers who do not qualify for Employment Insurance.

Support for people facing unemployment

The new Canada Emergency Response Benefit will provide a taxable benefit of \$2,000 a month for up to four (4) months to:

- workers who must stop working due to COVID-19 and do not have access to paid leave or other income support.
- workers who are sick, quarantined or taking care of someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children that are sick or need additional care because of school and daycare closures.
- workers who still have their employment but are not being paid because there is currently not sufficient work, and their employer has asked them not to come to work.
- wage earners and self-employed individuals, including contract workers, who would not otherwise be eligible for Employment Insurance.



The Canada Emergency Response Benefit will be accessible through a secure web portal starting in early April. Applicants will also be able to apply via an automated telephone line or via a toll-free number. NOTE: This benefit replaces the previously announced Emergency Care Benefit and the Emergency Support Benefit.

Support for people who are sick, quarantined, or in directed self-isolation

The new Canada Emergency Response Benefit will provide a taxable benefit of \$2,000 a month for up to four (4) months to:

- workers who must stop working due to COVID-19 and do not have access to paid leave or other income support.
- workers who are sick, quarantined or taking care of someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children that are sick or need additional care because of school and daycare closures.
- workers who still have their employment but are not being paid because there is currently not sufficient work and their employer has asked them not to come to work.
- wage earners and self-employed individuals, including contract workers, who would not otherwise be eligible for Employment Insurance.

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit will be accessible through a secure web portal starting in early April. Applicants will also be able to apply via an automated telephone line or via a toll-free number. NOTE: This benefit replaces the previously announced Emergency Care Benefit and the Emergency Support Benefit.

Support for people who are unable to work

The new Canada Emergency Response Benefit will provide a taxable benefit of \$2,000 a month for up to four (4) months to:

- workers who must stop working due to COVID-19 and do not have access to paid leave or other income support.
- workers who are sick, quarantined or taking care of someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children that are sick or need additional care because of school and daycare closures.
- workers who still have their employment but are not being paid because there is currently not sufficient work and their employer has asked them not to come to work.



- wage earners and self-employed individuals, including contract workers, who would not otherwise be eligible for Employment Insurance.

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit will be accessible through a secure web portal starting in early April. Applicants will also be able to apply via an automated telephone line or via a toll-free number. NOTE: This benefit replaces the previously announced Emergency Care Benefit and the Emergency Support Benefit.

All members who commonly rely upon EI during the cessation of work period are encouraged to apply for EI through the normal process.

ETFO is continuing to advocate for school boards to provide pay for casual and daily occasional members and is having regular virtual meetings with government representatives.

We will keep ETFO members informed. Please ensure that you are registered to receive ETFO communications online and regularly check your email.

I am working part-time and receiving partial loss-of-earnings benefits. Will they continue during my school board's shut down due to COVID-19?

Yes. You will continue to receive the same benefits that you were receiving at the time of shut-down.

I am worried about the impact the pandemic will have on my pension. Where can I find information?

Members should feel reassured as both OMERS and the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) remain available to answer your questions and process pension applications. As members continue to be paid by boards, contributions to OTPP and OMERS continue to be made to those pension plans.

Both OTPP and OMERS have posted information for their members regarding COVID-19 developments. Information is found by clicking on the following links:

- [OTPP](#)
- [OMERS](#)

How will this COVID-19 reality affect me as a retired member who works as an occasional teacher?

Retired occasional teachers should continue to be mindful of re-employment rules regarding working for a maximum number of days while collecting their pension from OTPP. If you are a retired occasional teacher, you need to be aware of the potential impact of some boards averaging ongoing pay for occasional teachers.



OTPP is requiring boards to continue to report service that constitutes re-employment; however, OTTP recommends that employers advise re-employed pensioners to waive the payments if they do not want them to count toward re-employment limits. If affected retired occasional teachers have not received such communication from their board, they should contact their Board's payroll department accordingly.

Will I continue to receive my WSIB benefits if my employer shuts down due to COVID-19?

Yes. All wage-loss benefits are continuing to be paid and all loss-of-earning benefits are up-to-date. You will continue to receive the same benefits that you were receiving at the time of your school board's shut-down.

I have been performing modified duties due to a workplace injury, but receiving full pay. Will the WSIB cover any pay I lose if my employer shuts down due to COVID-19?

No. If you were not receiving any wage-loss benefits at the time of the school board's shut-down, you won't receive any new wage-loss benefits. If you were receiving any other benefits at the time of the shut-down, such as health care benefits, those will continue.

Where can I find all the updated information on COVID-19 and WSIB?

For all of the latest information from the WSIB on COVID-19 both for ongoing claims and for claims for entitlement for COVID-19 please consult the following:

- www.wsib.ca/en/novel-coronavirus-COVID-19-update
- www.wsib.ca/en/faqs-about-wsib-claims
- www.wsib.ca/sites/default/files/2020-03/adjudicativeapproach2019novelcoronavirus20200322.pdf

I am very anxious and stressed about COVID-19. Could ETFO provide advice to help me maintain my mental health during this situation?

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating great anxiety and stress as concerns for the physical safety of you and your family increases. To reduce this anxiety, take those measures you can to protect yourself and your family.

Use proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette; stay at home to limit contact with people; when you do go out to shop for essential needs, use social distancing by keeping at least a 2-meter distance from others; and keep informed about and follow direction from public health authorities.



Trying to do all of this in rapidly evolving circumstances can be stressful and overwhelming. While it is important to stay informed, it is also important to recognize the impact this has on your mental health. Many Boards have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in place that would be available for some members. Those with benefits also have access to a variety of professionals. Contact your local regarding your EAP.

Please see the links below for tips to help maintain your mental health during this pandemic.

- www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-COVID-19
- cmha.ca/news/COVID-19-and-mental-health
- www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/news-article/13920/choosing-sources-information-carefully-critical-COVID-19-mental-well-being-says

For regular ETFO updates, please check etfo.ca/link/covid19

FINAL THOUGHT

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<http://www.etfo.ca/AboutETFO/Publications/eNewsletters/Pages/eNews.aspx>

