COVID-19 at work

The situation around COVID-19 is constantly evolving and WCB is truly committed to providing reliable coverage for workers and employers in the case of a work-related COVID infection. Workers who contract the COVID-19 illness in their workplace as a result of their regular job duties will get the coverage and support they need.

Here's what to expect if a worker contracts COVID-19 and the infection may be work-related:

- Report it to us.

- We can accept a positive PCR test or rapid antigen test (RAT) result or a doctor's diagnosis. We do not require a photo of the worker's test result.

- If the worker is symptomatic and testing or obtaining a diagnosis is unavailable to them, you can still report their illness. We will work with you and your worker to confirm their COVID-19 illness and adjudicate the claim.

COVID-19 has raised many questions about coverage, reporting responsibilities and process. The following information helps you determine your responsibility as an employer during this pandemic.

When COVID-19 may be work-related

In every case, we adjudicate work-relatedness and benefit entitlement based on individual workers' circumstances.

In order to confirm whether an illness is work related, we will assess the risk of exposure in the workplace. Specifically, we look to ensure the following conditions are met:

- The nature of employment involves sufficient exposure to the source of infection,

  - and -

- The nature of employment is shown to be the cause of the condition,

  - or -

- The nature of employment creates a greater risk of exposure for the worker.

Reference: Policy 03-01: Part II - Occupational Disease

Some occupations are known to create greater risk of exposure to COVID-19, including those who **provide direct care to patients with the condition**. Examples may include but are not limited to:

- Nurses

- Nursing home staff

- EMTs and paramedics

- Homecare aids

- Hospital cleaning staff

- Prison infirmary staff

In addition, workers who **provide direct service to the general public** are at an increased risk of exposure. Examples of these types of occupations may include, but are not limited to:

- First responders

- Correctional officers

- Grocery workers who interact directly with the general public

- Bus drivers

- School janitors

- Restaurant staff such as waiters, table cleaners, hostesses, etc.

- Hotel staff who provide direct client service and/or clean rooms where an infected person has stayed

- Other occupations which require direct extended contact with the general public

Acute care and continuing care facilities

Locations of outbreaks in acute care and continuing care facilities are reported publicly when there are two or more cases, indicating that transmission within the facility has occurred.

All other workplaces and facilities

Outbreaks in other types of workplaces may or may not be reported by Alberta Public Health. Regardless of whether they are publicly reported as outbreaks, a cluster of COVID cases within a workplace may still be considered an increased risk of exposure.

If you believe there is an outbreak within your worksite, you should report it to us for investigation.

Questions & answers about COVID-19 coverage

How does a non-occupational illness become an occupational hazard?

The illness may become an occupational hazard when work duties place a worker at increased risk of exposure to infected people. This heightened risk of exposure increases their risk of developing the illness while working.

This may also be the case when an infected person (e.g., a client, contractor, supervisor, worker, etc.) brings the virus into the workplace, which can lead to a cluster of infections causing a facility outbreak.

Workers within the facility are now at greater risk of working with people who are infected and/or coming into frequent contact with infected surfaces, even when they do not have contact with the general public.

We will investigate each reported case to confirm level of risk, likely source of infection and work-relatedness. If there is evidence the infection occurred outside of work, the condition would not be work-related.

What is an outbreak?

An outbreak is a sudden and/or unexpected rise in the number of cases of a disease. An outbreak may occur in a community, camp, facility or geographical area.

COVID-19 is highly contagious and an outbreak can occur very quickly.

What does a workplace outbreak mean from a WCB perspective?

When multiple employees in the workplace fall ill, other workers at that site may have a greater risk of contracting the infectious disease than the general public.

Why do these claims need to be reported?

These claims need to be reported so we can investigate work-relatedness and provide support to eligible workers. As an outbreak in the workplace may put workers at greater risk of contracting the disease than the general public, the condition may be covered through the workers' compensation system.

If you're not sure whether the COVID-19 infection is work related, report it to us. We will evaluate the claim based on specific criteria for exposure, cause and risk outlined in this document and in Policy 03-01, Part II – Occupational Disease, Q4.

Should I submit a claim if I suspect an outbreak?

Yes. Tell us when multiple workers at your facility have symptoms or a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis. This applies even if there is no direct work with the general public.

Note: If your employees work directly with the general public, you should report each case as it is identified.

If the outbreak is first reported to be community-based, do I still need to report?

Yes. A facility outbreak may occur in tandem with a community outbreak. If there are multiple positive cases in the workplace, claims should be submitted for adjudication to determine whether the circumstances in the workplace put workers at a greater risk of contracting the disease. We will adjudicate every individual claim to determine eligibility for coverage.

If I send a worker home to prevent them from getting sick, do I need to report it to WCB?

No. If there is no illness, there is no claim. There's no need to report this to WCB.

Will WCB accept COVID-19 claims where there are symptoms present but no medical reporting that confirms a diagnosis of COVID-19?

Typically, we look for a confirmation of a positive test (PCR or RAT) or a physician's diagnosis. Due to extraordinary circumstances, we recognize workers may not be able to easily access testing and it may not be safe for them to visit a doctor if they are symptomatic. We are committed to ensuring that does not prevent your workers from receiving the support they need.

If a worker is symptomatic and believes they may have contracted COVID-19 at work, but is unable to access diagnostic resources, you can contact us directly to report their illness. We can begin the claim process based on the workers' own self-report of symptoms that are known indicators of COVID-19. In some situations, we may arrange and pay for a private PCR test if it is safe and practical to do so.

What happens when I submit a COVID-19 claim?

Like any other workplace illness or injury claim, we must determine whether your worker's exposure to the disease arose out of the course of employment and was caused by an employment hazard (in this case, workplace exposure to the virus).

We have dedicated teams of people who specialize in the adjudication of COVID-19 claims. If your worker's illness meets the conditions for coverage, we will cover medical aid costs and any time lost due to the condition.

How does WCB determine if the illness is work-related?

Once a claim is reported, we will investigate to determine if the employment circumstances resulted in a greater risk of infection or if there is evidence to support the condition was contracted outside of the workplace.

Give us a call if you are unsure of the coverage available or if you should report. You can reach us at 1-866-498-4694 and one of our industry support specialists can assist you.

myWCB employer mobile app
App Store & *Google Play*

1-866-922-9221 *(within AB)*
1-800-661-9608 *(outside AB)*

*employer.account.services@
wcb.ab.ca*

www.wcb.ab.ca

January 14, 2022 • WCB-597   Page 3 of 3