

This morning, at 8:30 a.m./EST, Ontario Premier Doug Ford declared a State of Emergency in Ontario to help fight the spread of COVID-19. The announcement included the following:

- Effective immediately the government is prohibiting gathering over 50 people
- All facilities that house indoor recreation programs are to be closed until March 31
- All libraries, private schools, and child care centres are to close until March 31
- All bars and restaurants are ordered to close, except for those that offer take-out and delivery options
- All theatres, movie theatres, and concert venues are also ordered closed
- Public transit, grocery stores, pharmacies, offices, construction projects and all other businesses **will continue to run at this point in time until further notice from the Premier**

What's next for employers?

Short-term Layoffs

In the event that you are forced to execute a short-term layoff, please contact us to discuss next steps.

EI Sickness Benefits

Canadians quarantined can apply for Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits. Service Canada is ready to support Canadians affected by COVID-19 and placed in quarantine, with the following support actions:

- The one-week waiting period for EI sickness benefits will be waived for new claimants who are quarantined so they can be paid for the first week of their claim
- Priority EI application processing for EI sickness claims for clients under quarantine
- People claiming EI sickness benefits due to quarantine will not have to provide a medical certificate
- People who cannot complete their claim for EI sickness benefits due to quarantine may apply later and have their EI claim backdated to cover the period of delay
- Individuals in quarantine and seeking to waive the one-week EI sickness benefits waiting period and be paid for the first week of their claim should call **1-833-381-2725 (toll-free)**

Work-Sharing (WS) Program

Work-Sharing (WS) is an Employment Insurance (EI) program that helps employers and employees avoid layoffs when there is a temporary decrease in business activity beyond the control of the employer. The Government of Canada has introduced temporary special measures to the Work-Sharing (WS) program to support employers and employees affected by the COVID-19. The temporary measures are outlined as follows:

- extend the maximum duration of WS agreements from the current 38 weeks to 76 weeks
- waive the mandatory waiting period between agreements, and
- ease recovery plan requirements for the duration of the WS agreement

The temporary measures are only available to employers either directly or indirectly experiencing a downturn in business due to COVID-19 (as well as for the forestry and steel and aluminum sector). The program provides EI benefits to eligible employees who agree to reduce their normal working hours and share the available work while their employer recovers. The goal of the program is for all participating employees to return to normal working hours by the end of the agreement. The employer and the employees (and the union, if applicable) must agree to participate in a WS agreement and must apply together. The temporary special measures are effective March 15, 2020 to March 14, 2021.

Eligibility

You are eligible to apply if you are experiencing a downturn in business activity related to the global outbreak of COVID-19, and have:

- WS agreements signed between March 15, 2020 and March 14, 2021
- WS agreements that began, or ended between March 15, 2020 and March 14, 2021, and
- WS agreements that ended between June 23, 2019, and March 14, 2020 and are in their mandatory cooling-off period

How to Apply

- If you are applying for a new agreement, or if you currently have a 38-week agreement in place, and are applying for the 38-week extension, you must submit the documents as outlined in the following link: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/work-sharing/temporary-measures-forestry-sector.html>
- You can also refer to the WS Applicant Guide for Temporary Special Measure for additional details: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/work-sharing/guide-applicant.html>
- For more information on the Work-Sharing Program, call the following toll-free number: **1-800-367-5693 (TTY: 1-855-881-9874).**

Stay Connected and Make Your Employees' Mental and Physical Health a Top Priority

It is critical that managers and supervisors ensure that their employees stay connected to the workplace and know that you are there to support them during this uncertain time. It is important to encourage your employees to stay connected with one another via phone, email, Facetime, etc. to reduce the impact that social-isolation has on mental health.

If you have EAP programs, we recommend that you encourage your employees to access those services both for physical and mental health assistance.

Resource Corner

COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-self-assessment>

Public Health Ontario
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/>

Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) - Pandemics
<https://www.ccohs.ca/topics/hazards/health/pandemics/>

We recommend that employers provide the following resources to their employees:

- Telehealth **1-866-797-0000**
- Phone number for your local Public Health Department
- Phone number for your local hospitals