

Information for USW Members in Canada

Health and Safety During COVID-19

As of March 19, 2020

Everyone Doing Their Part

We are facing an unprecedented time with the COVID-19 pandemic. Extreme measures are being implemented in an effort to slow the spread of the virus. Public health agencies are monitoring the outbreak and are regularly updating guidance as to how individuals should respond.

USW encourages members to stay current with the latest information from your local health authority and follow their most current guidelines. Our primary concern is for the health and safety of our members, their families and our communities.

We need to approach the pandemic by using all the tools we normally use to address health and safety concerns. We apply the “precautionary principle,” where we evaluate risks and hazards.

Preparing Ourselves

The best advice to follow is that coming from the Government of Canada through the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC): www.canada.ca/public-health.

Be aware of increased risks of more severe outcomes for Canadians such as:

- People aged 65 and over.
- Those with compromised immune systems.
- Those with underlying medical conditions.

Every effort must be made to avoid crowds and large gatherings. It is recommended that “social distancing” (keeping a distance of two metres; or six feet) be instituted to whatever degree is possible. And of course, vigilant hand washing and other hygiene practices should be followed.

All non-essential travel out of the country is restricted.

If You Have Travelled Outside of Canada Recently

If you have returned to Canada from outside the country, you need to self-isolate. Whenever there has been even a slight chance of someone coming in contact with the virus, they must self-isolate for a minimum of 14 days. This can include returning from out of the country, being in direct contact with someone returning from out of the country or being in direct contact with someone displaying symptoms of COVID-19 (even in the absence of a diagnosis).

Be aware that your employer will require you to self-isolate under these conditions even if you don't feel ill yourself.

Be Aware of Your Mental Health

While we are focused on our physical health during the pandemic, it is equally important to keep a check on our mental well-being. Fear and anxiety are normal responses to the current situation. There is a lot of disruption and uncertainty. Accept that there are things that are beyond our control right now. Instead, focus on what you can control, which is really a lot. Any of the many national, provincial or local mental health organizations (e.g., [CAMH](#), [CMHA](#)) have an abundance of useful information on their websites.

Mental health practitioners suggest a number of things to guide you through these times:

- Limit the amount of time you consume media information on COVID-19. Stay informed but don't fall into the trap of needing to be constantly absorbing the multitude of (repeated and sensationalized) media coverage.
- Those with pre-existing mental health conditions are at risk of an exacerbation of symptoms due to increased stress. If you or someone you know is experiencing issues, most mental health providers will be able to assist remotely in non-crisis situations. Because people with addiction issues are at risk of recurrence, many organizations such as [AA](#) will institute online meetings.
- While social distancing (or even social isolation) will be required, this does not mean we need to cease social contact. With the many social media platforms available, there is no need to stop a lot of the activities we normally do; we just need to do them virtually. Start an online book club, gaming group or video watch party. The possibilities are endless.
- Maintain routines as much as possible. Continue to walk the dog, do family activities that are still possible, and most importantly, maintain any physical activities that can be done. There is a well-established link between physical and mental well-being. If you can't do your normal exercise routine (such as going to the gym), try to find other things that can give you comparable results.
- Get outside in nature. You can go for a walk and get some fresh air and sunshine, while maintaining your social distancing.
- Think about helping out some of the more vulnerable people in your community. If you are still able to go out and pick up groceries, consider asking a neighbour who can't go out if they need anything. Exercising compassion can do wonders for everyone's well-being.

SUMMARY

- Follow the latest updates from your local health authority.
- Practice good handwashing hygiene and etiquette around sneezing and coughing.
- Maintain social distancing (a distance of two metres; six feet).
- Immediately initiate self-isolation if you start to display symptoms or come into contact with someone who has.
- Tend to your physical and mental health.

Should you have any concerns at your workplace, do not hesitate to bring them up to your employer and your union safety representative or other union official.

For more information and resources for workers,
see our USW page on COVID-19: www.usw.ca/covid19.