

COVID-19 at work

The situation around COVID-19 is evolving; however, WCB continues to provide coverage for work-related instances of COVID infection.

In doing so, the following applies:

- WCB is committed to ensuring workers who contract illness in the workplace, as a result of their regular duties, get the coverage and support they need.
- We will work to ensure there are alternative ways to confirm cases of COVID-19 in the workplace if testing is unavailable.
- There are circumstances where WCB may not require a test to adjudicate a claim, as in the case of a workplace outbreak – healthcare settings.

COVID-19 (a coronavirus) is not typically an occupational illness. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause respiratory illness in people, ranging from mild common colds to severe illnesses.

COVID-19 is a new coronavirus not previously identified in humans. It is believed to be spread mainly by coughing, sneezing or direct close contact with someone who is sick with COVID-19.

Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to COVID-19. In severe cases, infection can lead to death.

(Sources: [Government of Canada](#), [Alberta Health Services](#))

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

When a worker contracts COVID-19 as a direct result of the duties of their employment, they are entitled to compensation if 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](#)

In every case, WCB-Alberta adjudicates work-relatedness and benefit entitlement based on the specific and unique circumstances of each case.

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

- Nurses
- EMT/Paramedics
- Hospital cleaning staff
- Nursing home staff
- Homecare aids
- Prison infirmary staff

In addition, workers whose employment requires them to 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.

Cases should be reported to WCB, unless:

1. The employee was on vacation or away from work at the time of infection.
2. The employee is not ill but must quarantine due to suspected or confirmed exposure.

A worker will likely be covered in the event of a widespread outbreak at their place of work.

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 at daycares and schools will be reported publicly when there are five or more cases.

In the case of workplaces outside of the above, outbreaks may not be reported by Alberta Public Health. However, a cluster of COVID cases within a workplace may still be considered an increased risk of exposure.

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

Questions & answers about COVID-19 coverage

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

While most cases of COVID-19 are not occupational, the illness may become an occupational hazard when work duties place a worker at increased risk of exposure to infected people, thus increasing their risk of developing the illness.

This may also be the case when an infected person (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 required to work in 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.

Each reported case is investigated by WCB 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 at work?

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 have a confirmed diagnosis of the disease, 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 cases need to be reported so WCB can investigate work relatedness. 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.

Should I submit a claim if I suspect an outbreak?

Report to WCB 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. If there are also multiple positive cases in the workplace, claims should be submitted for adjudication to determine whether the circumstances in the workplace are putting workers at a greater risk to contracting the disease. A facility outbreak may occur in tandem with a community outbreak. Every claim will be adjudicated to determine eligibility.

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

Once a claim is reported, WCB 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 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.

