

Telecommuting

Telecommuting is a work arrangement where workers perform all or parts of their jobs outside the employer's usual place of work. Telecommuting relies on the use of technology to perform work from home or other remote locations.

Telecommuting workers may be covered under workers' compensation. When coverage is in effect, responsibilities under workers' compensation legislation (including recording and reporting accidents) still apply, even though the work is performed from the worker's home or another remote location.

Telecommuting arrangements may be temporary or permanent. Temporary arrangements may include carrying out a time-limited project at home or working from home during a quarantine period. Permanent arrangements include workers who perform all or part of their duties out of their home on a regular basis.

Telecommuting does not cover occasional situations when a worker brings work home on their own initiative, even with the employer's knowledge (e.g., to complete a project in time for a deadline).

Workers' compensation considerations

Telecommuting arrangements

Employers should consider drafting a formal telecommuting agreement with any staff working remotely. A written policy or agreement clarifies the arrangement for the worker and employer and helps WCB-Alberta adjudicate claims that arise while telecommuting.

Reporting

Because injuries or illnesses arising from telecommuting may be work-related, employers and workers are required to report these injuries and illnesses to WCB.

For more information see Section 33 of the [Workers' Compensation Act](#), Section 9 of the [Workers' Compensation Regulation](#), and [Policy 01-05, Part II, Application 2, Recording and Reporting Accidents](#).

Entitlement

Taking into consideration the individual circumstances of each claim, WCB-Alberta looks at the following factors, and possibly others, to determine whether a telecommuting injury is work-related and therefore covered:

- Was the activity on work time?
- Was the activity for the employer's benefit?
- Was the worker paid for the time?
- Was the worker in that time and place due to employment reasons?
- Was the work arrangement authorized by the employer?
- Did the injury occur in the course of using equipment or materials supplied by the employer?

See Policy 02-01, Part II, [Application 1: Employment Hazards](#) and [Application 2: Time and Place](#).

Travel

Travel at the direction of the employer is covered. This includes situations when a telecommuting worker travels from their home to the employer's office or another site to attend a work-related meeting.

It may also include travel to pick up supplies for the worker's home office that are used in the performance of their work duties.

For more information about travel see [Policy 02-01, Part II, Application 3, Travel](#).

The workspace

When telecommuting is authorized by an employer, as a general rule, coverage is confined to the defined workspace unless the worker is engaged in an activity that is directly related to the telecommuting work.

For more information on [WCB-Alberta policies](#), please visit our website.

Example scenarios

Scenario 1:

Margaret is a typist for a municipality. She transcribes transportation planning reports from audiotapes. She works in a spare room in the basement of her home that was designated as her workspace.

Her home office has a computer, fax machine and printer supplied by the employer. On her way to the basement office one morning, Margaret slips on some water on her kitchen floor. She falls and hurts her lower back. Is her injury covered?

Unlikely. Margaret was not yet in her designated workspace and the hazard did not relate to her employment.

Scenario 2:

Margaret drives to a local office supply store to purchase toner and paper for the printer in her home office. On the way home she is involved in a motor vehicle accident and suffers a neck injury. Is Margaret covered?

Probably, provided Margaret did not deviate from the route for a personal errand. If she deviated from a direct route to the office supply store, she is not covered until she completes her personal errand and returns to the direct route.

Scenario 3:

Margaret has typed transportation planning reports out of her home for three months using her own desk and chair. Her work station was not ergonomically assessed before beginning the telecommuting arrangement.

Lately, she is experiencing pain in her wrists and neck. Her doctor diagnosed a repetitive strain injury in her wrists. Her employer sent an ergonomist out to assess her workstation.

The ergonomist determined her chair and desk, which cannot be adjusted, do not suit her body and she needs new office equipment. Is her injury covered?

Probably. Although Margaret provided the desk and chair, the injury is work-related because the desk and chair are required as a condition of her employment at home.

Scenario 4:

Margaret receives a box of office supplies delivered to her home. The supplies are paid for by her employer and are necessary for her employment.

The box is large and, when carried, prevents her from seeing her feet. As she carries the box down the stairs to her home office, she trips and falls. Her doctor diagnoses a sprained ankle, contusions and a concussion. Is Margaret covered?

Probably. Depending on the facts, the injury may be covered even though it occurred outside the designated workspace. The box is a hazard introduced by her employment and contributed to the accident.

Scenario 5:

At noon, Margaret decides to take a lunch break. She leaves her home office in the basement and climbs the stairs to her kitchen.

On her way up the stairs, she misses a step, falls and cuts her chin on a step. The cut requires three stitches. Is Margaret covered?

Probably not. Margaret left her designated workspace on personal business and the stairs are not a hazard of employment.

