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PROTECTING YOUR WORKPLACE & PEOPLE: COVID-19/CORONAVIRUS

With over 80,000 confirmed cases worldwide and 11 confirmed cases in Canada, the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 has sparked concerns of a worldwide pandemic. Although Health Canada has stated that the risk posed by the coronavirus to Canadians is low, they have also advised Canadians against non-essential travel to China and are actively monitoring the situation. Employers should also be vigilant and monitor the impact of the outbreak on their employees including its effects on anxiety and workplace safety.

Remind Employees of Best Practices

Awareness is critical – it allows for clear-eyed thinking and helps with managing anxiety. Employers should remind their employees that, much like any other illness, taking preventative measures will decrease the chances of transmission and outbreaks in the workplace. Best practices include:

- Maintaining cleanliness of the workspace.
- Washing hands often and thoroughly using hot water and soap.
- Staying home when feeling unwell, including when exhibiting symptoms such as fever, coughing and difficulty breathing.
- Sneezing/coughing into a sleeve or tissue and not into your hand.
- Avoid excessively touching your eyes, mouth and nose.

Employer Best Practices

The key practice an employer should maintain is solid communication with the workforce. This includes informing employees of the above best practices, of any leave of absence policies and keeping employees informed of any new developments. Employers should also ensure that they have a plan ready in case of an emergency. Other measures include maintaining a well ventilated and clean workplace, providing appropriate training and appropriate safety equipment (such as N95 masks) when necessary and encouraging employees who are exhibiting symptoms of illness to stay at home. If certain employees are flexible and can work from home, then it may be advantageous to have those employees work from home.

Leaves of Absence

Employees may have paid sick leave available under contract or unpaid sick leave available under the Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000 or other applicable legislation in provinces outside of Ontario. Employees should be reminded of their entitlements and encouraged to use their time-off if they develop symptoms indicative of coronavirus or flu.



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Additional Information

Ontario Ministry of Health: www.ontario.ca/coronavirus

Toronto Public Health: www.toronto.ca/coronavirus

Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novelcoronavirus-infection.html>

Center for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

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