

Memo

To: All Employees

From: Executive Director, Unit Chair, Health and Safety & Labour Relations Committees

Date: Date

Re: Understanding Essential Service for Our Workplace

Further to our previous correspondence related to Covid-19, we have been actively following the latest developments in relation to this Pandemic so as to ensure the health and safety of the people we support, our staff and their families, as well as the community. At this time, we would like to respond to some common questions we have been receiving from staff regarding COVID-19 and the workplace.

1. We Have Been Declared An “Essential Service” – What Does That Mean? As of this past week, our organization has been deemed to be an ‘essential service’ by the provincial government. Being deemed “essential” has two effects: 1. We can remain open; 2. Our employees may be subject to different rules based on recommendations from Public Health. The “Essential Services” designation does not mean that our workers fall into the same classification as health care workers or workers in long-term care homes. These groups are subject to special Emergency Orders from the government during this crisis. We are actively monitoring and consulting with Public Health and will keep you apprised of any special rules that may apply to our operations or our staff as they are announced.

2. What Does Self-Isolation Mean? The Provincial Government describes self-isolating in the following terms: Self-isolating means staying at home and avoiding contact with others.

- Do not leave your home or see other people except for essential reasons. Do not attend work, school, or other public places. When you must leave your home, do not use public transportation, taxis, or ride-shares. If possible, arrange for delivery of supplies for you or the performance of errands.

- If other people reside in your house, stay in a separate room away from other people, use separate bathroom if possible.
- Avoid persons who are vulnerable to COVID-19 (those with pre-existing medical conditions and seniors).
- Keep a distance of two meters from other people and wear a mask if available. Practice respiratory etiquette and frequently and thoroughly wash your hands.
- This must continue until your healthcare provider advises that it is safe to leave. A full list of recommendations for self-isolation can be found on the Province's COVID-19 website.

3. Am I required to self-isolate if I've been supporting a person at __your Agency name__ that is confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19? In discussing this issue with Public Health, we have been informed that as an essential services worker you would not be required to self-isolate post-contact. Instead, you are advised to self-monitor for a period of 14 days after a potential exposure, and to self-isolate only if they experience symptoms (e.g. a fever, a cough, or difficulty breathing). At present the direction we have received is that you can continue to support the home where COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed while you are asymptomatic while using appropriate Personal Protective Equipment.

4. When Can I Refuse “Unsafe” Work? The general rule under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (“OHSA”) is that an employee can refuse work that would endanger them or other workers. However, not all employees have the full right to refuse work. Workers who work in residential care operations (such as PHPD) have a limited right to refuse work. Specifically, you are not permitted to refuse work on health and safety grounds where : (a) the risk is inherent in the work we do at __your Agency name__, the risk of infectious disease is inherent in the work – that’s why we train you on universal precautions and the use of personal protective equipment; or (b) the refusal to work would endanger another person’s life, health or safety (for instance, due to inadequate support).

5. Will there be “danger pay” during the Pandemic? We are committed to ensuring that our staff are fairly compensated at all times, including this Pandemic. At present, we are subject to a moderation period under Ontario legislation, as well as communications from the Ministry in relation to the types of expenses they consider to be valid COVID-19 expenditures. We are not aware of any approval by the Ministry of any increases or shift premiums for employees or any exemptions from Bill 124, nor any funding or flexibility of funding use for these purposes. At the same time, we are actively seeking guidance from the Ministry, as well as increased funding to support enhanced compensation for staff during this Pandemic and we are committed to providing you with information (and enhancements where permissible) as soon as possible.

We remain committed to continuous communications, information sharing, and ensuring best practices. We appreciate the efforts of all our staff during this trying time.

If you have general concerns about safety in the workplace for yourself or your family, please speak to your Service Manager or to a Health and Safety Representative. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with any other questions or concerns.