WHAT SUPERVISORS NEED TO KNOW:  
COVID-19 & THE WORKPLACE

NOTE: This Guide is being updated on an on-going basis. This version has been updated as of April 21, 2020. Please check the HR COVID-19 website regularly for updates.

McMaster continues to closely monitor local and national developments around COVID-19. Updates on the University’s preparation and response are posted regularly on the University’s COVID-19 website.

Philosophy & Approach

McMaster University values its people and the important work they do in support of the University’s mission and strategic priorities. During this unprecedented time, it is important that thoughtful consideration be given to staffing requirements. Consideration should be guided by our consistent overall philosophy and key employee & labour relations principles:

- The health, safety and well-being of the McMaster community is a top priority. In accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the University must take every reasonable precaution to protect the health and safety of faculty and staff.

- As a Top Employer in the Hamilton-Niagara Region, McMaster University values its people and the important work they do in support of the University’s mission and strategic priorities.

- The University is committed to inclusive excellence and long-term, collaborative relationships with its faculty, staff, and union partners.

- The University makes decisions affecting employment in a manner that is fiscally responsible and guided by evidence-based research, with a careful view toward fair and equitable decisions that are affordable and sustainable in the long term.

- McMaster recognizes that its faculty and staff may need additional flexibility, support, and understanding as the circumstances with the COVID-19 pandemic continue to evolve, which much be balanced with the needs of the University and handled in a reasonable and equitable way.

Purpose of this Guide

This Guide has been formed as part of a toolkit for supervisors, as they continue to implement continuity plans for the affect that COVID-19 is having on their work unit and employees. It includes steps for supervisors to take, and information to consider, to ensure the University community is adequately prepared to respond to the evolving circumstances involving COVID-19 as it relates to the workplace.
HR Contacts & Resources
Human Resources is here to help support you during this unprecedented time. Please contact your HR representative should you have any questions or require further support. To learn more about our HR teams and partners, including services and contact information, please click here.

Each section within this Guide contains specific links to resources that help to support the advice and recommendations provided within. Additionally, HR FAQs are continuing to be posted, and help to address additional areas of inquiry (e.g. recruitment activities, employee travel, etc.).

For any other guidance on University-related COVID-19 matters, please visit the University’s COVID-19 website.

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RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR SUPERVISORS

1. Check in Regularly for Updates

Supervisors need to stay connected to the University’s COVID-19 update reports, as provided on the University’s COVID-19 website and related links, to remain current on the University’s response and any actions that may be required. We strongly recommend checking for updates at least once a day.

2. Implement Business Continuity Plans

Supervisors should continue taking steps to mitigate disruption to critical functions.

A Critical Function is defined as:

- A function that when not delivered creates an impact on the health, safety of individuals or animals
- A function that may lead to the failure of an Academic / Administrative / Research Unit if activities are not performed in a specified period of time

- All areas should ensure that employees who can work from home are able to do so. Supervisors are encouraged to review the information available to help employees use best practices to stay healthy and productive when working from home.

- There are certain employees who perform roles that cannot be done at home and that are deemed to be essential in accordance with the list of essential services declared by the Government of Ontario. Those employees will continue to report to work and are asked to work in partnership with their supervisors to implement strategies to enable social distancing and to ensure health and safety while in the workplace. For more information, please refer to Information for Successfully Continuing to Work Onsite.

- Employees who perform roles that cannot be done at home and are not essential services will not report to work. Supervisors will communicate directly with employees in such circumstances. In the spirit of keeping employees working, it is possible that alternative work may be assigned (please refer to Temporary Flexible Work Arrangements & Considerations with Respect to Available Work sections within this Guide).

- It is important that supervisors maintain an active list of which employees are working either remotely or on-site.
3. Communicate with Employees

Supervisors are reminded of the need to continue communication with employees to help share important updates, check in on their health and well-being, as well as help to answer any questions related to employment or pay. This is especially important when working remotely. Further information, including helpful tools and resources on communication, engagement and wellness can be found online.

**TEMPORARY FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

There may be temporary flexible work adjustments that could be feasible during this time, to help support continued operations. Below are some examples of possible temporary adjustments.

Please reach out to Human Resources for support in exploring these options, to ensure that your employees are appropriately compensated in consideration of the changes you are seeking to make.

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<tr>
<th>POSSIBLE TEMPORARY ADJUSTMENT OF WORK DUTY, HOURS, OR LOCATION</th>
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<td><strong>Adjustment of Working Hours</strong></td>
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**CONSIDERATIONS WITH RESPECT TO AVAILABLE WORK**

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, there may start to be a reduction in available work across the University. McMaster University is committed to keep employees working to the extent possible, and encourages supervisors to continue to consider creative options in support of identifying available work.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CONSIDERATIONS FOR IDENTIFYING AVAILABLE WORK</th>
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| **Consider Project Work Available in the Work Unit** | • Assign alternative duties within the scope of the job description, for work at home or on campus (or in host hospital in the Faculty of Health Sciences)  
  • May include project work or training/professional development that is beneficial to the employee and the work unit (or broadly to the University) |
| **Consider Redeployment Options** | • Assign alternative duties outside the scope of the job description, for work at home or on campus (or in host hospital)  
  • Collective agreement provisions provide flexibility for temporary transfer, additional duties, alternative role (see above)  
  • Compensation adjustments may be applicable, including additional duties payment. |
| **Consider Learning & Development** | • May include training/professional development that is beneficial to the employee and the work unit (or broadly to the University); health and safety training |
| **Use of Paid Time Off** | • Use of vacation or other banked days (e.g. compensating time off, banked flex time, etc.). Examples: Agree to use vacation days or other banked days to make up a full week (e.g. work 3 days, vacation 2 days), or agree to use vacation time and personal leave days to continue pay where there is a lack of work. |

Following consideration of all opportunities to identify available work or ways to continue pay, there may still eventually be a temporary lack of work for some employees or employee groups, depending on how long the circumstances and government orders related to COVID-19 are in place.

Supervisors should seek advice and support from Human Resources, including Employee/Labour Relations, to address individual circumstances before implementing the approaches set out below to address a temporary lack of work.
## Approaches Where There is a Temporary Lack of Work (or Funding)

<table>
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<th>Approach</th>
<th>Details</th>
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| **Reduction of Hours of Work**                | - Supervisors may proceed with a temporary reduction of hours in certain circumstances, with notice to the employee(s).  
  - This will have pay and benefit implications for employees for a temporary period, but may still be beneficial as compared to an unpaid leave of absence. |
| **Declared Emergency Leave**                 | - Ontario declared an emergency due to COVID-19 on March 17, 2020 that has been extended to May 12, 2020 (and may be extended further).                                                 
  - During a declared emergency, an employee may have the right to take an unpaid, job protected leave if the employee will not be performing the duties of their position because of the emergency and because certain circumstances apply, in accordance with section 50.1 of the Employment Standards Act, 2000.  
  - **Where there is a lack of work** for a temporary period because of COVID-19, McMaster may initiate a temporary leave for an employee or an employee group. In this case, it is the intention of the University to recognize the temporary nature of this lack of work, and respect the access that employees have to this job-protected statutory leave.  
  - Please consult with your Employee & Labour Relations Consultant on whether this would apply in your situation. |
| **Infectious Disease Emergency Leave**        | - In some circumstances, the employee may come forward to request a leave of absence.                                                                                                               
  - The Employment Standards Act has been amended to provide a new job-protected leave, an Infectious Disease Emergency Leave.  
  - An Infectious Disease Emergency Leave is a job protected leave for employees unable to work for the following reasons:  
  1. **The employee is under medical investigation, supervision or treatment for COVID-19.**  
     - Note: Normal sick leave provisions and procedures (appropriate to each employee group) will apply if an employee is sick or is away from work due to illness or injury. Please consult with the Employee Health Services team if employee wishes to discuss medical concerns. |
2. The employee is acting in accordance with an order under the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

3. The employee is in isolation or quarantine in accordance with public health information or direction.
   - Note: This includes anyone in self-isolation, including but not limited to:
     - those 65 years of age or older,
     - those with an underlying medical condition (no medical note is required),
     - those who have travelled outside of Canada

4. The employee needs to provide care to a person for a reason related to COVID-19 such as a school or day-care closure.

5. The employee is prevented from returning to Ontario because of travel restrictions.

If an employee determines they would want to request this leave of absence, please ask them to complete the McMaster [Leave of Absence Request Form](#), or email you with their request.

Please connect with Human Resources once this request is received, in order to facilitate next steps. **It will be important to record which of the 5 reasons above describes the purpose of the Infectious Disease Emergency Leave.**

*Note*: it is possible for an individual person to qualify for the Infectious Disease Emergency Leave for multiple reasons, sequentially or at different periods in time.
EMPLOYEE ABSENCES & REPORTING PROTOCOLS

As always, should an employee be ill, they are encouraged to stay home.

Remember that employees’ personal health information is private and take steps to respect their privacy. In anticipation of a higher volume of absences due to illness and periods of self-isolation, there is a need to temporarily amend the University’s absence management procedures.

In the event an employee is unable to attend work due to illness, they should continue to utilize the same methods for absence reporting as they currently do. The following will apply:

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<tr>
<th>EMPLOYEE ABSENCES &amp; REPORTING PROTOCOLS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When an Employee is Ill</strong></td>
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<td>- Employees are eligible for sick leave benefit entitlements based on their applicable collective agreement or employment contract.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- For more information about specific sick leave entitlements, please refer to the applicable employee group at hr.mcmaster.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If the employee who is ill does not have sick leave benefit entitlements, or has exhausted their entitlements, a discussion may be had with the employee on opportunities to utilize available paid time off provisions (e.g. vacation, personal days). Otherwise, the Supervisor will approve the employee’s leave of absence (Infectious Disease Emergency Leave as outlined above).</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Absences due to illness that are anticipated to be 10 shifts or more need to be referred to your Employee Health Services Specialist for appropriate absence management, pursuant to typical procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Absences that are related to COVID-19 will not normally require medical documentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or who is awaiting test results is required to self-isolate. Further information about protocols for the workplace when an employee has tested positive or is awaiting test results are available online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If an employee advises you they are ill or absent due to COVID-19, please immediately notify the Occupational Health Nurses in Employee Health Services via email at</td>
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In accordance with instructions from the Government of Canada, the following individuals are to self-isolate for 14 days:

- Anyone who has returned from travel outside of Canada (for 14 days after their return to Canada),
- Anyone who is over the age of 70 (instruction given from the Province of Ontario on March 16, 2020)
- Anyone who is immunocompromised (instruction given from the Province of Ontario on March 16, 2020)
- Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or who is awaiting test results is required to isolate. Further information about protocols for the workplace when an employee has tested positive or is awaiting test results are available online.

Should you have an employee who is required to self-isolate or isolate, the following will apply:

1. Advise the employee to follow self-isolation or isolation instructions and ask them not to come to campus during the period of self-isolation.

2. Faculty and staff are expected to continue to work while in self-isolation, although they should not physically attend work.

3. If alternative working arrangements are not possible, a discussion may be had with the employee on opportunities to utilize paid time off provisions as available (e.g. vacation, personal days). Otherwise, the supervisor will approve the employee’s leave of absence (Infectious Disease Emergency Leave as outlined above).

Employee Health Services is available to support you; however, there is no need for Employee Health Services to manage this absence or to be involved in a Return to Work process.

However, if an employee advises you they are self-isolating due to COVID-19, please immediately notify the Occupational Health Program.
Nurses in Employee Health Services via email at byrner1@mcmaster.ca to enable central tracking of absences due to COVID-19.

For more information about specific sick leave entitlements, please refer to the applicable employee group at hr.mcmaster.ca. A Self-Isolation Tracking Tool is available for Supervisors to use to keep track of 14-day self-isolation periods that staff may be undertaking.

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<th>When an Employee Makes a Personal Election to Self-Isolate</th>
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<tr>
<td>If you have an employee who has advised that they would like to self-isolate at their own election, with no guidance provided by Public Health to do so, you may approve this request through adjusted work arrangements or as a leave. In this scenario, there would not be access to sick leave benefit entitlements. In this case, the following would apply:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. When you receive information that the employee would like to self-isolate at their own election, approach the conversation in a supportive way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Consider whether alternative working arrangements are possible during this period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If alternative working arrangements are not possible, a discussion may be had with the employee on opportunities to utilize available paid time off provisions (e.g. vacation, personal days), or to grant an unpaid leave.</td>
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<tr>
<th>When an Employee Requests Time Off to Care for a Family Member(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>If you have an employee who has requested time off to care for a family member, you are encouraged to consider ways in which you can support the employee. This may flexible hours, reduction in hours, use of paid time off provisions available to that employee group (e.g. vacation, personal days).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the employee is not sick, there would not be access to sick leave benefit entitlements. However, depending on the family member relationship, the Infectious Disease Emergency Leave may apply in this situation (as outlined above).</td>
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### When an Employee Identifies a Requirement for Accommodation

Employees may request accommodation – for example: due to disability or family status, if they have a heightened concern about working with others due to their underlying health status, or if they have a requirement to attend to a dependant family member.

We encourage you to first have an open and supportive discussion with the employee to understand what temporary accommodations may be needed during this time, and to consider what is operationally feasible to meet these needs.

Consider the following documents: [University’s Workplace Accommodation Policy](#) and [Workplace Accommodations Procedure](#).

Depending on the circumstances, the *Infectious Disease Emergency Leave* may apply in this situation (as outlined above).

If you require support in working through this request, please contact [Employee & Labour Relations](#) or [Employee Health Services](#).

### When an Employee may have been exposed to COVID-19

When a there is a positive case of COVID-19, Public Health actively engages in contact tracing and case management to identify and contact anyone who came into direct contact with the individual.

Anyone who was in direct contact with an individual who tests positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by Public Health and advised to **self-isolate**.

Anyone who may have been in contact indirectly with the individual is advised to **self-monitor**.

Further information about protocols for the workplace when an employee has tested positive or is awaiting test results are available online.

### When an Employee expresses concern about their Health & Safety

The health, safety and well-being of the McMaster community is a top priority. In accordance with the *Occupational Health and Safety*
Act, supervisors must take every reasonable precaution to protect the health and safety of workers.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act also provides workers with:

- The right to know
- The right to participate, and;
- The right to refuse unsafe work

Some employees may have additional questions about their safety in the workplace, as it relates to COVID-19, or the availability of additional, reasonable precautionary measures that may be necessary, based on the nature of the role. There are additional materials with respect to Health and Safety in the workplace available to employees and Supervisors. Furthermore, planning for the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace may generate unique inquiries.

Please contact Director, Health, Safety, & Risk Management at morinel@mcmaster.ca, or your Employee/Labour Relations representative with specific questions. As there may be specific additional requirements for healthcare or hospital settings, in Faculty of Health Sciences, please contact your FHS Safety Contact.

Should you be approached by an employee to help resolve a health and safety related work refusal, further to RMM 114 Work Refusal Program, please connect directly with the EOHSS team for further support.

PROMOTING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Campus and community supports are available to help faculty and staff flourish in their personal and professional lives, and are especially important during these unprecedented times. Additional COVID-19 related supports related to mental health, personal well-being, resilience and a broad range of health, safety and wellness topics have been shared as part of HR COVID-19 website.