

COVID-19 Return to Work Frequently Asked Questions

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About COVID-19

Where do I go for the latest information about the current situation in the Niagara region?

[Niagara Region Public Health](#) features the most current updates about the evolving situation. Check the website regularly for changing information and tips for staying healthy.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 according to Niagara Region Public Health?

Common signs of infection include:

- Fever and /or
- New cough or a cough that is getting worse

Other symptoms can include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Sore throat
- A runny or congested nose (not allergies)
- Chills

Other non-specific symptoms are:

- Muscle aches
- Fatigue (feeling weak, tired, exhausted)
- Headache
- Diarrhea
- Lost sense of taste or smell
- Conjunctivitis
- Rash
- Severe chest pain
- Having a very hard time waking up
- Feeling confused
- Lost consciousness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Unexplained abnormally rapid heart rate
- Chronic conditions getting worse

Non-specific symptoms for young children may include:

- Lethargy (feeling sluggish, tired, exhausted)
- Poor feeding

How is COVID-19 spread?

Human coronaviruses cause infections of the nose, throat and lungs. They are most commonly spread from an infected person through:

- Respiratory droplets generated when you cough or sneeze
- Close, prolonged personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands

Current evidence suggests person-to-person spread is efficient when there is close contact.

City's recovery plan

What is the City's plan to recover from the pandemic?

On June 3, 2020, St. Catharines City Council approved the STC Framework for Recovery: Our Path Forward, which provided a high-level overview of how the City would recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

It focuses on three areas:

- Physical and mental wellbeing of staff and citizens
- Operations necessary to provide services to citizens
- Financial wellbeing of the City and citizens

To determine how the City would resume normal operations, the plan evaluated each service on safety, feasibility and community impact. The result was a plan that broke the recovery into four stages:

Stage 1

Most important services continue to be delivered; some facilities reopen.

Stage 2

More City services return; some staff return to on-site work; administrative and some recreational facilities reopen with physical distancing in place.

Stage 3

Most City services returned; and most City buildings reopen with new operational procedures and guidelines.

Stage 4

A vaccine has widely been administered or the risk of COVID-19 no longer exists. All City services return to pre-pandemic levels and all City facilities open to the public.

For more information on the City's recovery framework and progress, visit www.engagestc.ca

Staying safe and healthy at work

What type of planning is underway to support us and keep us safe as we continue to provide services?

Ensuring the safety of employees is a primary concern of the Senior Leadership Team, as it looks to resume important services that our residents depend on. When making a decision to resume additional services three criteria are considered:

Safety

Can we deliver the service safely and maintain that safety?

Feasibility

What resources are necessary to deliver it safely, and is it fiscally responsible to expend that investment?

Community

How does this investment fit in the overall picture of the recovery for our community? Will it service a broad section of the community? Is it available through other partners?

In addition, the City's Recovery Planning Team, which includes members from departments and locations across the organization, is working to implement items which:

- Ensure health and safety of City employees as they work to provide important services
- Reduce opportunities for transmission within City facilities
- Provide support as staff balance personal and work-related priorities
- Support staff who are working from home

What is being done to protect my health and safety while I perform my work?

The City is following all the appropriate guidelines issued by the federal and provincial governments, as well as direction from Niagara Region Public Health. This includes retrofitting certain facilities to ensure both staff and residents are kept safe as operation levels increase and modifications are made to the delivery of existing City services.

Retrofitted features could include:

- Physical distancing markers
- Physical barriers
- Sneeze guards/protective screens
- Floor decals
- Instructional signage
- Hand sanitizer stations

Some of the other proactive measures that have been implemented include:

- Posting signage to promote frequent hand-washing and social distancing

- Social distancing – this is a critical part of keeping our workforce safe and healthy:
 - Asking those who can, to work from home, creating needed space
 - Limiting the number of individuals per vehicle
 - Staggering start and end times
 - Developing staff rotations or shifting work times
 - Restricting public access to facilities
 - Distributing cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE)
 - Providing regular communications to keep employees informed

What can I do to help keep myself and my colleagues safe in the workplace?

We need to work together to keep our workplaces safe. Steps that you can take to keep yourself and your colleagues safe include:

- Stay home if you are sick
- Wash your hands frequently
- Practice physical distancing by keeping two metres distance between you and others.
- Keep your distance in shared spaces, such as kitchens and lunchrooms.
- Hold any necessary team meetings virtually or in large, open spaces.
- Check-in regularly with your colleagues. This can be a call, text, email or video-chat.
- Take and use only the sanitation and cleaning supplies you need.
- Clean vehicles and shared spaces after each use.
- If you have been given reusable cloth masks, be sure to wash them daily

What do I do if I believe a co-worker is ill?

Speak to your direct supervisor or manager, who will assess the situation.

What should I do when a colleague has indicated they are not self-isolating or adhering to social distancing guidelines?

Speak to your direct supervisor or manager, who will address the situation.

What should I do if I feel like my work situation is unsafe?

Speak to your direct supervisor or manager immediately about your concerns.

I am concerned that I am at risk of getting sick while at work or on the way to work. What are my options?

Speak with your direct supervisor, manager or Human Resources to learn what measures are in place to ensure safety in the workplace. Check the [Niagara Region Public Health website](#), which provides a list of recommended precautions to follow.

You can also speak to your direct supervisor or manager to explore if alternate work arrangements, including work from home and flexible work hours, are possible.

I'm starting to feel sick. What do I do?

Do not come into work if you are unwell. Advise your direct supervisor or manager of your absence. Continue to self-monitor and contact your health care provider if needed.

If you are unable to work from home, you will be coded as sick.

You will need to call in to report your absence each day until the fourth consecutive day of absence. On the fourth day, you will need to submit a [Non-Occupational Injury/Illness Status Report \(ISR\)](#) . If you are unable to submit an ISR, contact Human Resources to discuss.

For Fire Suppression, the [ISR](#) is required after 36 hours for an illness or within 24 hours for an injury.

If you develop COVID-19 related symptoms contact Public Health and contact Human Resources to provide an update regarding your absence.

What do I do if I think I have COVID-19 symptoms or have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19?

Do not come into work. Stay at home and self-isolate.

If you think you have COVID-19 symptoms or if you have been in close contact with someone who has it:

- Contact Human Resources to report your potential exposure
- Contact [Niagara Region Public Health](#) to arrange for a test

If you are unsure about what you should do, use the [Ontario COVID-19 self-assessment](#) to help determine how to seek further care. The self-assessment is only meant as an aid. It cannot diagnose you. Consult a health care provider if you have medical questions and inform Human Resources about any care instructions provided.

If you are having difficulty breathing or experiencing other severe symptoms, call 911 immediately. Advise them of your symptoms and travel history.

If an employee receives a positive test result, will Public Health be notified and do they have a protocol to notify potentially impacted coworkers?

Public Health works with each individual with a confirmed case of COVID-19 to create a list of close contacts that require follow-up.

If you have been contacted by Public Health, follow the advice and instructions provided to you. If you have been advised to self-isolate, report your absence to your direct supervisor or manager and contact Human Resources.

What is considered close contact?

Public Health Ontario states that a 'close contact' is anyone who has been less than 2 metres apart for longer than a brief time (i.e., had a chat). Walking by someone is not considered a close contact.

Niagara Region Public Health will contact you directly if you have been identified as a close contact of someone that may have contracted the virus.

How will I be informed if a co-worker has tested positive for COVID-19? Do I need to self-isolate?

Niagara Region Public Health will work with the employee to identify anyone they may have had contact with. If you have had close contact with the person you will be contacted directly. If you are at risk, you will be given instructions to self-isolation.

If you believe you had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, but have yet to receive instructions on what to do, contact [Niagara Region Public Health](#) to discuss.

There may be situations where the City, out of an abundance of caution, will go beyond public health recommendations and ask additional employees to self-monitor, self-isolate or seek testing before returning to the workplace.

What is the difference between self-isolation and physical (social) distancing?

Self-isolation means separating yourself from others, by staying at home and avoiding contact with other people, including people in your own home. It should happen if there is a possibility you have been exposed to COVID-19, or if you are experiencing COVID like symptoms or have been in a high-risk situation like travelling internationally.

More information on self-isolation is available on the [Niagara Region Public Health website](#)

Physical or social distancing means keeping distance between you and others to ensure the virus doesn't spread. It is not about staying home. It is about keeping two metres (six feet) of distance between you and others.

For more details on physical distancing, visit the [Niagara Region Public Health website](#)

What does self-isolate or self-monitor mean?

Self-isolation means separating yourself from others, by staying at home and avoiding contact with other people, including people in your own home. It should happen if there is a possibility you have been exposed to COVID-19, or if you are experiencing COVID like symptoms or have been in a high-risk situation like travelling internationally.

More information on self-isolation is available on the [Niagara Region Public Health website](#). A [guide for people who are in self-isolation is also available on the site](#).

Self-monitor means that you should watch for COVID-19 symptoms and avoid crowded public spaces where you cannot easily separate yourself from others.

More information is available in the Niagara Region Public Health's [guide for people who have been advised to self-monitor](#).

When should I self-isolate?

According to Niagara Region Public Health you must self-isolate if you:

- Start to develop COVID-19 related symptoms
- Are living with someone who has symptoms and is being sent for COVID-19 testing
- Are a close contact of a positive case with COVID-19
- Are a laboratory confirmed case with COVID-19
- Are required to do so under the Quarantine Act due to travel outside of Canada.

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health is urging self-isolation for

- All persons over 70 years of age
- Individuals who have an impaired immune system

If you are required to self-isolate, but are not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, ask your direct supervisor or manager if you can work from home. Contact Human Resources to determine when you can safely return to the workplace.

I am not feeling sick, but I have been asked to self-isolate. What should I do?

Inform your direct supervisor or manager immediately of your absence if you have been directed to self-isolate. If you are not feeling sick or are only experiencing mild symptoms you may be able to work from home.

Contact Human Resources to discuss the circumstances of your self-isolation.

What if I am required to self-isolate but I cannot work from home?

If you must self-isolate but cannot work from home you may be eligible for paid leave, depending on your circumstances. Contact Human Resources to determine if you are eligible.

If you haven't already done so, report your absence to your direct supervisor or manager and Human Resources.

Returning to the workplace

For those working remotely, when will we be returning to the office?

Employees currently working from home will continue to do so until at least Dec. 31, 2020, unless you are needed to support your department's recovery plan by working from a City facility.

This will ensure employees are not congregating in large numbers and will allow the City to prioritize the measures required to keep front-line staff safe.

Do I have to return to work?

We need employees to continue to work to deliver the important services that residents rely on.

If you are recalled from a temporary layoff you are required to return to work as soon as possible. Maximum timeframes for the return of recalled unionized employees are outlined in their respective collective agreement.

If you have been telecommuting and you have been informed that you need to return to work in a City building or facility, the expectation is that you will do so within a period of not more than five (5) calendar days.

If your personal circumstances make it impossible for you return to work on site within these timeframes, your manager will work with you to explore whether alternate work arrangements are available.

Can I work from my regular work location instead of at home?

Employees currently working from home will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, unless they are needed to support their department's recovery plan by working from a City facility.

This will help ensure employees are not congregating in large numbers and will allow the City to prioritize the measures required to keep front-line staff safe.

If working from home is not feasible for you, talk to your manager to explore whether an alternative arrangement is possible. These requests will be evaluated on a case-specific basis.

I've been temporarily reassigned to alternate work—how long will my reassignment last?

The duration of employee reassignments will vary based on the status of the emergency response. Staff reassigned to support COVID-19 emergency response efforts will continue in these roles until further notice.

Decisions on when to return employees to their home positions will be the subject of discussions between management in both the home and reassigned departments.

If you have questions, contact your direct supervisor or manager (in your home and reassigned positions.)

With the resumption of some City programs and services, are employees returning from Declared Emergency Leave (DEL)?

Employees on Declared Emergency Leave will be contacted by their manager/supervisor or Human Resources to discuss specific details related to their recall to work.

What do I do if I require an accommodation?

Contact your direct supervisor or manager to develop an accommodation plan.

Masks and face coverings

When will employees be required to wear masks and protective eyewear?

Cloth Masks (non-PPE)

- Employees must wear a cloth mask in all areas of City buildings that are accessible to the public, including spaces such as elevators, lobbies, lunchrooms, hallways and washrooms.
- Masks are NOT required in areas of City facilities that are only accessible to City employees, provided they are able to maintain appropriate physical distancing (at least two metres apart.)
- Employees will be provided with a limited supply of cloth masks if they work in City buildings that have common areas that are accessible / shared with the public.

The Public Health Agency of Canada advises to use cloth masks only for a short period of time when physical distancing is not possible.

To learn how to wear masks correctly, visit:

- [How to wear a non-medical fabric mask safely](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public: When and how to use masks](#)

Droplet Barrier / Procedure Masks (PPE)

- Employees must wear a disposable droplet barrier / procedure mask as personal protective equipment (PPE) when other controls are not in place to maintain physical distance, such as barriers. This includes situations such as riding in vehicles with more than one employee.
- It is recommended that employees wear a disposable droplet barrier / procedure mask and protective eyewear as PPE when entering a situation where there is concern that social distancing may not be maintained. This includes situations such as entering an occupied dwelling to conduct an inspection.

Protective Eyewear (PPE such as safety glasses, goggles & face shields)

- Employees are required to wear protective eyewear and a droplet barrier / procedure mask as PPE when you are unable to maintain physical distancing with individuals that are not wearing masks.
- In situations where physical distancing may be compromised but those around you are wearing masks, eyewear is not required.

Employees who are required to wear masks and eyewear as PPE, must review the following safety information:

[How to wear a mask safely: Do's and Don'ts](#)
[Cleaning and Disinfection Instructions for Eye/Facial Protection](#)

Also recommended is this short video:

[How to Put On & Take Off Masks](#)

Why are droplet barrier / procedure masks important as PPE?

A droplet barrier / procedure mask is a loose fitting, disposable personal protective equipment (PPE) device that creates a physical barrier between the mouth and nose of the wearer, and potential contaminants in the immediate environment such as liquid droplets or splatter. As such, it acts as PPE offering some degree of protection to the individual wearing it.

In situations where physical distancing cannot be maintained this type of mask should be worn to provide protection to the individual wearing it. This mask also offers a degree of protection to those who come in close contact with the individual wearing it.

Why are non-medical cloth masks important?

Wearing a non-medical cloth mask has not been proven to protect the wearer. However, a non-medical mask may help to protect others, by stopping the spread of droplets, similar to covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue.

Cloth masks are not considered personal protective equipment (PPE) and are not intended to protect the employees wearing it from COVID-19 and cannot be worn as a substitute for PPE.

Employees will be provided with a limited supply of cloth masks if they work in City buildings that have common areas that are accessible / shared with the public. Employees should speak with their direct supervisor or manager for more information on availability and distribution.

The Public Health Agency of Canada advises to use them only for a short period of time when physical distancing is not possible, and to be sure to wash your hands after putting it on or taking it off as the face covering itself can be contaminated.

Wearing a non-medical mask is not a replacement for following proven measures such as hand washing and physical distancing. In an effort to further reduce the risk to our employees, where possible public access to our facilities will be restricted.

Where can I find information on how to wear masks and face coverings safely?

Employees wearing masks or face coverings should:

- Wash or sanitize their hands before putting on a mask
- Avoid touching the front of your mask wearing or removing it
- Place the used mask in a bag after wearing, to bring home for washing
- Wash or sanitize your hands after removing your mask

To learn more about face coverings and how to properly wear, fit, remove and clean your non-medical face covering visit:

- [Ministry of Health - Face coverings and face masks](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada - Do's and Don'ts of mask use](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada - How to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly \(described video\)](#)
- [How to wear a non-medical fabric mask safely](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public: When and how to use masks](#)

When I am in an enclosed public space in a City facility and able to maintain physical distancing, do I have to wear a mask?

No. You are not required to wear a mask in areas of City facilities that are accessible only to City staff, provided you are able to maintain appropriate physical distancing (at least two metres apart) from your colleagues.

You must wear a cloth mask in all areas of City buildings that are accessible to the public. This includes spaces such as elevators, lobbies, lunchrooms, hallways and washrooms.

The Public Health Agency of Canada advises to use cloth masks only for a short period of time when physical distancing is not possible.

A plexiglass barrier separates me from the customer in my work area. Do I still have to wear a mask?

No. You do not have to wear a mask if a physical barrier separates you from a customer and you are able to maintain appropriate physical distancing.

What if I cannot wear a mask for medical reasons?

If you are unable to wear a mask and cannot maintain appropriate physical distancing in your workspace you should speak to your direct supervisor or manager to arrange an accommodation.

You may be asked to provide medical to support your request for accommodation.

Can I wear a face shield instead of a mask?

No. Face shields do not offer the same protection as a mask and are used in specific circumstances in addition to a mask.

Under the new bylaw, I am now required to wear a mask at work. Where will I get one?

Employees will be provided with a limited supply of cloth masks if they work in City buildings that have common areas that are accessible / shared with the public. If you have not received masks, contact your direct supervisor or manager.

Can I wear a mask that I have purchased in place of the cloth masks provided by the City?

Yes, with the exception of masks with exhaust valves which are not allowed as these valves allow potentially infectious respiratory droplets to be released outside of the mask.

Ideally any mask that you wear will meet the standards offered by the World Health Organization. The WHO recommends three-layer masks with an inner layer of an absorbent material, such as cotton or cotton blends; a middle layer made of a non-woven material polypropylene or cotton to enhance filtration of droplets; and an outer layer of a non-absorbent material such polypropylene, polyester, or their blends. Stretchy, porous materials should be avoided.

The WHO guidance says masks should be changed if soiled or wet and washed regularly.

How will the public be advised that they are now required to wear a mask in City facilities?

The City and Niagara Region have engaged in a communication and education campaign to inform the public about the mask requirements, which includes signage at all City facilities.

In addition, access monitors will be at the entrances to City facilities to control the number of people entering and to ask people to put on a mask before entering.

Those that are not exempt and have simply forgotten to bring a mask with them, will be given a disposable mask by the access monitor.

Can I refuse to serve someone who is not wearing a face mask?

No. As everyone entering a City facility will be asked to put on a mask by the access monitors, you should assume an individual not wearing a mask is exempt.

However, even if you are serving someone who is not wearing a mask, you can continue to do so without putting yourself at risk. Adhere to physical (social) distancing requirements by asking the client to step back two metres.

Be sure to wash or sanitize your hands frequently and follow other precautions recommended by Niagara Region Public Health.

Will the City provide me with masks that I can give to clients who do not have one?

The City will provide access monitors at facility entrances with masks to give to people who arrive at our publicly-accessible facilities without one.

Does everybody have to wear a mask in enclosed public spaces?

The City recognizes that there may be certain individuals who cannot wear a mask. The by-law provides exemptions for:

- Young children
- Persons with medical conditions which prevent them from wearing a mask
- Individuals who are unable to apply or remove a mask without assistance
- Persons with protections, including reasonable accommodations, in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code that would prevent them from wearing a mask
- Persons assisting or accommodating another person with a hearing disability

Can I ask a resident for proof that they are exempt from the requirement to wear a mask?

No. This information is private.

Are there any City facilities accessible to the public that do not require mask wearing?

No, all City facilities accessible to the public will require people to wear masks, unless they are exempt.

However, people are allowed to temporarily remove mask if they are engaged in certain activities. These include:

- Athletic or fitness activities including water-based activities
- Consuming food or drinks
- Vocal artistic performances arranged for by the operators of the establishment
- Religious rights or ceremonies not compatible with the face being covered
- Emergency or medical purposes

Mental health supports

I'm feeling very anxious about the current situation. Is there anyone I can talk to?

It is understandable that you may be worried about your health and the health of those you care about during the pandemic. If you have concerns about how you are coping, speak with your family physician or a mental health professional.

The Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is also available to provide support to you and your eligible family members by phone, online and video counselling. Contact the provider at 1-844-880-9142 (TTY: 1-877-338-0275), through the My EAP app (available for Apple, Android and BlackBerry) or online at workhealthlife.com using The Corporation of the City of St. Catharines as the Organization.

Additional services available include:

- [Distress Centre Niagara](#) A 24-hour crisis line for anyone feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety.
St. Catharines & Niagara Falls – 905.688.3711
Port Colborne & Wainfleet – 905.734.1212
Fort Erie – 905.382.0689
Grimsby & west Lincoln – 905.563.6674
- [Mental Health and Addictions Access Line](#)
Telephone support for adult residents of Niagara facing mental health concerns. You will receive immediate access to supportive, trained responders who will provide information, support, and connections to local services. Call: 1.866.550.520
- [Niagara Region Public Health – Mental Health Programs](#)
Offers links to resources from experts in mental health on a variety of subjects related to COVID 19. Call: 1-800-263-7248
- [BounceBack Ontario](#)
A free, guided self-help program for people over 15 years of age, who are experiencing anxiety or depression, or may be feeling low, stressed, worried, irritable or angry. Call 1.866.345.0224.
- [Family Counselling Centre](#)
Offers quality counselling services to individuals, couples and families in the Niagara Region. Call 905.937.7731 or 1.888.937.7731 ext. 7215.
- [Niagara Life Centre](#)
Provides help for the physical, social and mental well-being of those in crisis through on-going counselling and support. Call 905.934.0021
- [Pathstone Mental Health](#)
Growing up in today's complex world can be tough. There are many burdens that can weigh on a child's mind. Pathstone Mental Health provides services for children's mental health and development. Call 1.800.263.4944.
- [Government of Canada: Mental health tips for working from home](#)

- [Canadian Mental Health Association \(CMHA\)](#)
Call 905.641.5222 ext. 231.
- [Big White Wall](#)
Free, anonymous, peer support website for individuals over the age of 16.
- [Huddol](#)
Free, peer support website that encourages people in like situations, with similar experiences to huddle around you to offer support, advice, guidance and resources.
- [Jostle](#)
Log into Jostle to participate in a discussion on a COVID-19 topic, or start your own discussion.

How can I reduce stress during these unprecedented times?

Morneau Shepell, provider of the City's Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) offers these tips for coping with stress related to COVID-19:

- Stick to the facts as communicated by public-health agencies or medical professionals. Instead of reading every article and going to every website, staying offline for a period can be beneficial.
- Try and keep it in perspective. Social media and news outlets can amplify misinformation.
- Follow prevention tips to stay healthy. Washing your hands often and properly is the single most effective way to stop the spread of disease.
- Practice stress and anxiety management. There are many proven ways to reduce stress and anxiety: getting enough sleep, balanced diet and hydration, exercise, talking about your fears with others, meditation, and more. Find the self-care practice that works for you.
- Seek help from your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You have access to professional assistance and resources 24/7 – from connecting with a counsellor to learning how to meditate, find confidential help that can help you move forward

You can build resiliency in times of uncertainty by:

- Accepting what's out of your control
- Embracing change
- Staying focused on the big picture
- Maintaining a positive attitude
- Connecting with others

For more information visit the [Morneau Shepell website](#).

What is the City doing to support staff mental health and wellness?

Links to available mental health and wellness resources can be found in the [Jostle Library](#) and on the [Employee Resources](#) page of the City's website. These include:

- Access to the City's Employee and Family Assistance program (EFAP).
- [Wellness Webinars offered by Morneau Shepell](#), providers of the City's EFAP. The webinars address topics like burnout, care for caregivers, stress relaxation techniques, tips on resilience and how to set up an ergonomic station when working from home.
- Short videos from [Workplace Strategies for Mental](#) with advise on how to adjust to the changing work environment .
- Access [BounceBack Ontario](#), a free, guided self-help program for people over 15 experiencing mild-to-moderate anxiety or depression, or may be feeling low, stressed, worried, irritable or angry.
- A list of mental health and wellbeing resources form [Niagara Region Public Health](#).

How is Green Shield supporting me and my family's benefits during COVID 19?

The best way to stay informed as a plan member is to access Green Shield Canada's online information portal at [GSC Support Centre](#).

Register for [Green Shield's Online Services](#) to submit claims online, print benefit cards, check eligibility, view coverage and other self-serve options.

Paid and unpaid leaves

My children's school or daycare has been shut down due to the pandemic. What are my leave options?

We need employees to continue to work to deliver the important services that residents rely on.

Talk with your direct supervisor or manager to explore alternate work arrangements and flexible hours that may accommodate your child-care needs. If other arrangements cannot be made, you may use vacation, time off in lieu or leave without pay.

Also, in certain situations, employees may be entitled to legislative leave, such as Emergency Leave: Declared Emergencies and Infectious Disease (DEL) under the Employment Standards Act.

Refer to the [Leaves of Absence section of the *Employment Standards Act \(part XIV\)*](#) or contact Human Resources.

The Federal Government has also established the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to assist those who have been affected by the COVID-19 situation.

Visit the [Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan](#) and [Service Canada site](#) for information on the programs and eligibility.

What type of leave can I use if my child or a family member is sick and I need to stay home to care for them?

If you need to take care of a sick child or family member, you may use vacation, time off in lieu or leave without pay. You may be entitled to legislative leave under the Employment Standards Act (ESA).

Refer to the [Leaves of Absence section of the *Employment Standards Act \(part XIV\)*](#) or contact Human Resources.

If I have a compromised immune system and don't feel comfortable going into work, what should I do?

Wherever possible, employees will be supported to work from home or offered appropriate accommodations. This includes, but is not limited to, alternate work arrangements or flexible working hours. A combination of work from home and alternate work location/hours could also be considered.

If these options are not feasible, managers will work with employees to explore leave options such as, vacation and other types of leave of absence etc. according to their applicable Collective Agreement, or policies.

Can I use sick leave if I am not feeling well?

If you are not feeling well, you should stay home and call in your absence in advance of your scheduled shift. You will be marked as sick. For some employees this will be a paid leave and for others it will be unpaid, as per your employment contract and / or applicable Collective Agreement.

Discuss with your direct supervisor or manager if you are able to work from home.

If you have even mild symptoms related to COVID-19 contact Human Resources for further direction.

My collective agreement or terms and conditions of employment do not provide paid sick leave or special leave. If I have to be away from work due to a personal emergency or sickness, what leave provisions do I have?

Employees should work with their direct supervisors or manager, in consultation with Human Resources, to review legislated leave options under the Employment Standards Act. There are other unpaid, job-protected leaves provided under the Employment Standards Act that might apply to an employee who is required to stop working due to a personal emergency or sickness. Each leave is different – the purpose of the leaves, the length and the eligibility criteria vary.

Refer to the [Leaves of Absence section of the *Employment Standards Act \(part XIV\)*](#) or contact Human Resources.

If I have contracted COVID-19 and do not have any available sick leave, how should my time away from work be coded?

Your time away from work will be coded as unpaid. Employees should work with their direct supervisor or manager, in consultation with Human Resources, to review legislated leave options under the Employment Standards Act.

New provisions are now available under the Employment Standards Act under [Emergency Leave: Declared Emergencies and Infectious Disease](#) for employees who are unable or unavailable to work due to COVID-19.

Will I be required to provide a doctor's note when I am on sick leave due to COVID-19 or suspicion of COVID-19?

No. You will be asked to self-isolate and self-refer for a COVID test if you haven't already been instructed to do so by Niagara Region Public Health or your health care provider.

If your test results are negative and you are still experiencing symptoms you may be asked to make an appointment with your health care provider and submit a completed [Injury/Illness Status Report](#).

Completed ISRs should be submitted as follows:

- Fire Association Employees fax ISRs to 905.688.9694 or by email to fireisr@stcatharines.ca
- All other employee fax ISRs to 905.688.9694 or by email to absencereports@stcatharines.ca

What is a Record of Employment (ROE) and why would I need one?

Service Canada requires a Record of Employment (ROE) to finalize claims for Employment Insurance. Employment Insurance (EI) is an unemployment insurance program in Canada that allows individuals who have recently lost income to receive temporary financial assistance.

How can I get a ROE?

If you have been placed on a Declared Emergency Leave or Infectious Disease Emergency Leave, the City will submit your ROE directly to Service Canada after your last pay has been processed.

What if I need to receive a ROE outside this process?

Should you require a ROE outside of this process, email payroll@stcatharines.ca.

Can I get a copy of my ROE?

You can view your ROE online by logging into your [Service Canada](#) account. If you don't already have an account, this link will also show you how to register. This is a secure online tool that gives you access to all your Employment Insurance information in one place.

To request a hardcopy of your ROE, email payroll@stcatharines.ca.

Vacation and travel

Can I cancel my vacation time because of the restrictions on travel?

Employees are encouraged to take vacation time in order to rest and recuperate. Discuss your vacation plan with your direct supervisor or manager.

Can I book vacation this year?

Yes, and it is important that employees take vacation.

While some employees may want to save vacation until travel restrictions are lifted, taking time off is good for your mental and physical health. For that reason, employees are required to take at least the minimum vacation days required under the Employment Standard Act.

Talk to your direct supervisor or manager for information on how to book vacation.

I've been temporarily reassigned to support the emergency response. Can I still take my vacation?

It is important to take vacation in order to rest and recuperate.

Reassigned staff are asked to check with their reassigned direct supervisor or manager, to schedule their vacation. Once that has been confirmed, the vacation request should be submitted for approval to the home department direct supervisor or manager. In that request, employees should note the request has been approved/vetted by the reassigned direct supervisor or manager.

Will I be covered under the current benefits plan if I become sick while travelling?

Prior to travelling, contact Green Shield Canada at 1.888.711.1119 or visit the [Green Shield website](#).

What do I do when I return from international travel?

Upon returning from international travel, including the United States, you must self-isolate for 14 days. Contact your direct supervisor or manager, and Human Resources immediately upon your return and before returning to work.

Visit the [Niagara Region Public Health website](#) or call 1-888-505-6074 for the latest COVID-19 updates.

What happens if a member of my household has returned from international travel and is required to self-isolate? Do I also have to self-isolate?

If your household member is in self-isolation due to travel contact your direct supervisor or manager and Human Resources before reporting to work.

If your household member does not have symptoms, has not tested positive for COVID-19 and is not suspected to have COVID-19, then you do not need to self-isolate. You will be asked to work from home, if possible.

If you are unable to work from home, you can continue to report for work as scheduled but you must wear a mask and practice a regimented hand washing routine.

If your household member develops symptoms within 14 days of travel, you must self-isolate. Do not report to work, notify your direct supervisor or manager of your absence and contact Human Resources for further direction.

Working from home supports

What tips do you have to help me work from home?

- Set up a dedicated workspace in your home, keeping in mind proper ergonomic positioning
- Maintain the same schedule (or close to it) as you would have, working onsite.
- Keep in contact with your co-workers and supervisors
- Use online meeting applications such as Skype Business and Zoom to replace in-person meetings

Information and resources to help employees be productive and stay connected to their colleagues while working from home can be found in the [Jostle Library](#) under COVID-19.

Who can I contact for technical support?

Submit a ticket via the Help Desk icon on your desktop.



If you are working from home and you have technical difficulties contact Information Technology on the dedicated support line by calling 905.688.5601 ext. 1222

Phones will be answered during business hours. IT will monitor messages left after hours.

I don't have everything I need to be comfortable and productive while working from home. Can I go get my office equipment?

Yes. Employees are to contact their direct supervisor with a list of items they would like to bring home and to arrange a pick-up time.

What type of office equipment can I bring home?

Employees may take home their assigned monitors (one or two, based on current workplace setup), monitor stand, docking station, laptop stand, mouse or trackballs, keyboard, headset, cables, assigned office chair, footrest and ergonomic mousepads/wrist rests. Employees are not to remove desks, tables, filing cabinets, or other large items of furniture.

Before removing any office equipment, be sure to contact your direct supervisor or manager.

Will the City pay for my internet if I'm working from home?

No, the City will not pay for home internet services.

Can home office expenses be deducted during COVID-19?

Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) form T2200 Declaration of Conditions of Employment is completed by the employer to certify that an employee is required to work from home and that any employment expenses not reimbursed by the employer may be claimed on their annual tax return.

Normally, most City employees do not qualify to claim employment expenses because the City provides the workspace and necessary equipment and supplies. It is possible expenses incurred by employees during the 2020 “stay home” directive may be eligible when filing a tax return for the 2020 calendar year.

Employees should retain receipts of all purchases necessary to perform their duties remotely. They should also note the square footage of the office area used and the total square footage of their residence, keeping track of home costs such as heating, hydro and water. These will be required if the tax rules allow employees to claim expenses incurred during the 2020 pandemic.

Are training and development opportunities continuing during COVID-19?

While, most in-person training and development opportunities cannot be offered during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City will continue to meet its legislative and regulatory training obligations

The City will also:

- Review training and professional development programs, and update for online delivery, where possible
- Create new, or update existing, virtual training modules to support key skill/knowledge areas
- Deliver online versions of new employee orientation and supervisor development programs

Questions related to specific training and development should be directed to your direct supervisor or manager.

Mail, document and cash handling

Will couriers and delivery people be able to enter City facilities?

Facilities that are open to the public will be accessible by couriers and delivery people. They will be required to undergo the same process for entering as the general public, which includes not entering if experiencing a self-screening for COVID-19 symptoms and wearing masks inside.

Are there any special procedures for handling mail or packages?

Employees receiving incoming mail and parcels should quarantine the items in a secure location for 24 hours before opening. When dealing with urgent items which must be opened immediately, employees must use good hand hygiene, including frequent hand washing / sanitizing and avoid touching their face with their hands.

What precautions should employees take who handle cash or documents from the public?

Employees who handle cash and paper presented by members of the public should practice good hand hygiene and sanitize their hands immediately after doing so.

This will prevent spreading the virus to workstations and other common surfaces in the workplace.

Cleaning

Will employee areas be cleaned and sanitized regularly?

The City's facilities staff will clean and sanitize areas that are frequently used with emphasis on high-touch areas such as door handles and handrails. Lysol wipes will be available to all employees with the expectation that employees sanitize their own respective work areas (desktops, keyboard, mouse) to help reduce risk of virus spread.

Who cleans meeting rooms after a meeting?

Cleaning supplies such as Lysol wipes will be kept in each meeting room. When the meeting is over, each participant is responsible for wiping down the surfaces they have touches, including the table and chair. If this is not possible, for whatever reasons, the meeting organizer is to make arrangements to have the room cleaned by facilities staff. A meeting may NOT take place in the room until it has been cleaned.

Are meeting rooms and lunch rooms still available to be used?

Yes, however the capacity is less as some tables and chairs have been removed to allow for physical distancing.

What can I do to ensure my work area is cleaned and sanitized?

Remove personal items such a photos and trinkets off desks so there are fewer possible contact points.

Before leaving at the end of the day, employees should clear the tops of desks and workstations of items such as papers and files, wipe down their desktop, keyboard and mouse using the provided Lysol wipes.

Additionally, items such as coffee mugs, water bottles, plates and cutlery used during the day should be brought home for proper cleaning.

Can I wear gloves at work?

No. Niagara Region Public Health recommends regularly washing your bare hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer offers more protection against catching COVID-19 than wearing rubber gloves.

You can still pick up COVID-19 contamination on rubber gloves. If you then touch your face, the contamination goes from your glove to your face and can infect you.

For this reason, only employees who are required to wear gloves as part of the personal protective equipment (PPE) for their job, will be allowed to do so.