



February 9, 2022

## **COVID-19 FAQ #6 – 2021-2022**

In this COVID-19 FAQ, you will find information on: personal protective equipment (PPE); health and safety; assessment and reporting; staffing; long-term disability (LTD); and Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB).

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **N95 masks are now available at school. Should I wear one? What should I know about them?**

It is well established that COVID-19 is an airborne virus that spreads through aerosols. That means that the virus can linger in the air, rather than fall to the ground in a droplet. N95 masks (respirators) are the standard protection against aerosols and are the best PPE available to Education Workers. Even without being fit-tested, they are superior to medical masks.

To maximize the benefit of your N95, make sure that it fits as well as possible, making a tight seal. Your employer has an obligation to provide training on the care, use and limitations of the PPE they provide.

#### **I want to wear an N95 mask, but when I put it on there are lots of gaps around the edge? How can I make it fit better?**

To keep you as safe as possible, the N95 needs to fit well. If there are fit, allergy or sensitivity considerations, there should be options available. If you are unable to access an N95 that meets your needs, speak to your ETFO local office.

#### **I'm only getting two N95s. How will they last?**

N95s are worn in a variety of workplaces. In a school setting, an N95 can be worn as long as it is not visibly dirty, wet or damaged. Boards should provide each worker with at least two masks, and replacements as needed, so a back-up is always available in case an elastic snaps or it becomes soiled.

Note that condensation will build up inside an N95 when worn outside in cold temperatures, so the provincial guidelines require medical masks be worn outside instead.

**Now that there is no contact tracing and it is harder to get tested, how do I know if there is COVID-19 in my school?**

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, workers have a right to know about hazards in their workplace. The Ministry of Labour has confirmed that if there is a positive case in a school, workers who have possibly been exposed must be made aware, while maintaining privacy. If that is not happening in your school or board, you can inform your ETFO local or make a [complaint](#) to the Ministry of Labour.

**I read in the news that some Teachers/Education Workers are refusing unsafe work. Has anything happened to make schools safer?**

Workers in Ontario have the right to refuse unsafe work, and their employer must follow the appropriate work refusal process. You can find out more information about work refusals by reviewing resources on [etfohealthandsafety.ca](#), viewing this [video](#) or speaking to your ETFO local.

Work refusals are often resolved in stage one or are investigated as a Ministry of Labour complaint. Safer conditions have resulted in some of these situations. For example, carbon dioxide monitors were brought in to evaluate ventilation, and employers have been reminded of their obligation to inform workers of hazards such as a positive COVID-19 case.

**Due to one of my student's extended absence this fall, I am uncertain how to best communicate their learning on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning report.**

As always, use your professional judgement to communicate the student's key learning, growth in learning and, where applicable, next steps. Remember there is no requirement as to the length of the written comments; the goal of communicating on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning report may be accomplished without filling up the boxes completely.

As you craft your comments, use these questions as a guide:

- What does the evidence tell us is the most significant learning demonstrated by this student at this time?
- How does this learning link to the overall expectations?
- What does it tell us about the growth in this student's learning?

For further information, refer to [ETFO Professional Judgement Guidelines for Completion of the Kindergarten Communication of Learning Report](#).

**There aren't enough Occasional Teachers available to cover absences in my school board. What is being done to address the shortage of Teachers in Ontario schools?**

The Ontario Teachers' Federation and the Ministry of Education have reached an agreement to amend the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) re-employment rules for the 2021-2022 school year. This amendment temporarily increases the 50-day re-employment rule to 95 days for Teachers, Principals and Vice-Principals until June 30,

2022. Retirees who will be filling roles in the publicly funded school system are eligible for the increase to 95 days for positions that cannot otherwise be filled by qualified members.

Retirees should always contact OTPP before beginning work after retirement if they are unsure whether re-employment rules apply to their situation. Re-employed retirees continue to be responsible for tracking their days and must notify the OTPP immediately if they plan to exceed the 95-day limit or if they have any questions about how the re-employment rules affect their pension. For more information about working after retirement, visit OTPP's [What's considered re-employment](#) web page.

School boards are also experiencing shortages that impact other ETFO members, including Designated Early Childhood Educators, Education Support Personnel, and Professional Support Personnel. This is also creating challenges.

### **I cannot work in a classroom due to COVID-19. Can I file an LTD claim?**

A member who has an illness or injury that prevents them from “performing the significant duties of their specific assignment” may be eligible for LTD benefits. OTIP requires that a member provide medical evidence from their health care providers to establish that they are “disabled” within the meaning of the LTD Policy. In addition, the Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan (OTIP) expects that, as per the duty to accommodate under Ontario’s *Human Rights Code*, medical accommodations in the workplace must also be put in place whenever possible, prior to claim approval.

Contact your ETFO local office for support. Members are encouraged to file their LTD applications early. OTIP processing time has been affected by the pandemic and decision wait times are longer than in past years.

### **Given that the Omicron variant is highly transmissible, how would I be able to prove that I got COVID-19 from work?**

The WSIB has updated their [COVID-19 FAQs](#) to address the rapid spread of the Omicron variant. The FAQs state that for a COVID-19 claim to be allowed, the evidence must show both that the person’s risk of contracting the disease through their employment was greater than the risk to which the public at large is exposed and that work significantly contributed to the person’s illness.

If you suspect that you may have contracted COVID-19 from work, you should file a WSIB claim immediately by taking the following steps:

- Complete a worker’s report of injury/disease using [Form 6](#).
- Report this to your employer.
- Report this to your healthcare provider:
  - You can call or email your doctor. Make sure to let them know your symptoms and that you believe you got sick from work.
  - A positive PCR test is NOT required to file a WSIB claim. Your doctor can diagnose you based on your symptoms and/or a positive rapid test.
- Document your symptoms.

- Document your activities (time, place, activity) in the days before onset of symptoms.
- Follow all public health guidelines for isolation and monitoring symptoms.

If you believe you were exposed to COVID in the workplace, but do not yet have symptoms or a diagnosis, please complete a [WSIB Worker's Exposure Incident Form](#). Submitting this form will help the WSIB gather information about the exposure incident, allowing faster processing of your claim if you experience an illness or disease in the future.

**For other information, please check [ETFO's dedicated COVID-19 webpage](#).**