

# Infectious disease:

## Exposed in the workplace

## Are you covered?



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Flu season hits Alberta like clockwork each fall and winter. When it does, thoughts turn to questions about WCB coverage for infectious diseases.

To be eligible for compensation, a disease or disability must arise out of, and occur, in the course of employment. Therefore, some special conditions apply to infectious disease claims. The first condition is that the type of employment must involve sufficient exposure to the source of infection. Second, coverage for infectious diseases requires that the worker's employment is the cause of the condition.

So does this mean that WCB will cover

you if you're sure that you caught the flu from your coughing co-worker? Usually not, as there's no way to know if you caught the flu from your co-worker, your child or someone on the bus.

Most workers aren't covered for conditions such as the flu, which are present in the general population. The exception may be hospital workers who are exposed to an infectious disease such as SARS as a result of treating infected patients.

Another situation where a worker is not likely to be covered by workers' compensation is if they're exposed to an infection and their employer asks them to stay home during the incubation period as a precautionary measure. However, if during, or immediately following the incubation period, the worker develops the disease and the conditions for coverage have been met, WCB will then retroactively cover medical aid costs and any time loss because of the condition. 

### When a pandemic strikes

Most people have built up their immunity to existing strains of influenza, and vaccines are available for known strains of the virus. A pandemic occurs when a significantly new strain of the flu virus develops and the existing immunity can't provide protection.

In a pandemic, more people are infected with the virus than during the normal flu season. Pandemics are difficult to adjudicate as the risk of exposure tends to be spread equally across the population. However, the conditions for coverage are the same as for any flu season.

*For more information, please check out Policy 02-01, Part II, Application 1, Question 2 and Policy 03-01, Part II, Application 3, Question 4 in WCB's Policies and Information Manual at [www.wcb.ab.ca](http://www.wcb.ab.ca).* 