COVID-19 at work

As the province moves forward from the COVID pandemic, WCB remains committed to providing reliable coverage for workers and employers in the case of a work related COVID infection.

Although most COVID infections will not be work related, some may be. Here’s what to do and expect if a worker contracts COVID-19 and the infection may be work related:

- Report it to us.
- We can accept a positive PCR test or rapid antigen test (RAT) result or a doctor’s diagnosis.
- If the worker is symptomatic and testing or obtaining a diagnosis is unavailable to them, you can still report their illness. We will work with you and your worker to confirm their COVID-19 illness and adjudicate the claim.

When COVID-19 may be work related

In order to confirm whether an illness is work related, we will assess the risk of exposure in the workplace. Specifically, we look to ensure the following conditions are met:

- The nature of employment involves sufficient exposure to the source of infection,
  - and -
- The nature of employment is shown to be the source of the condition,
  - or -
- The nature of employment creates a greater risk of exposure for the worker.

Reference: Policy 03-01: Part II - Occupational Disease

How is workers’ compensation coverage determined during a pandemic?

During a pandemic, when an infectious disease is most prevalent, some occupations are known to be at greater risk of exposure, because the sheer number of potentially infected people they interact with.

Examples of these types of occupations may include, but are not limited to:

- First responders
- Correctional officers
- Grocery workers who interact directly with the general public
- Bus drivers
- School janitors
- Restaurant staff such as waiters, table cleaners, hostesses, etc.
- Hotel staff who provide direct client service and/or clean rooms where an infected person has stayed
- Other occupations which require direct extended contact with the general public

Also, those who provide direct care to patients with the condition are clearly at greater risk:

- Nurses
- Nursing home staff
- EMTs and paramedics
- Homecare aids
- Hospital cleaning staff
- Prison infirmary staff

WCB occupational disease adjudicators will consider this known elevated risk as part of their adjudication review.
Workers’ compensation coverage during the endemic phase of a virus

During an endemic phase, typically, a workplace does not put a worker at greater risk than the general public. Therefore, most infections are not compensable.

When a pandemic infectious disease becomes endemic, casual community transmission is similar within and outside the workplace.

See examples of coverage on the infectious disease fact sheet.

Workplace outbreaks

An outbreak is a sudden and/or unexpected rise in the number of cases of a disease. COVID-19 is highly contagious and an outbreak can occur very quickly.

Acute care and continuing care facilities

Locations of outbreaks in acute care and continuing care facilities are reported publicly when there are two or more cases, indicating that transmission within the facility has occurred.

All other workplaces and facilities

Outbreaks in other types of workplaces may or may not be reported by Alberta Public Health. Regardless of whether they are publicly reported as outbreaks, a cluster of COVID cases within a workplace may still be considered an increased risk of exposure.

We will investigate each reported case to confirm level of risk, likely source of infection and work relatedness.

What does a workplace outbreak mean from a WCB perspective?

When multiple employees in the workplace fall ill, other workers at that site may have a greater risk of contracting the infectious disease than the general public during the period of the outbreak. This is due to the increased exposure to the virus during a normal workday.

If the outbreak is first reported to be community-based, do I still need to report?

Yes. A facility outbreak may occur in tandem with a community outbreak. If there are multiple positive cases in the workplace, claims should be submitted for adjudication to determine whether the circumstances in the workplace put workers at a greater risk of contracting the disease. We will adjudicate every individual claim to determine eligibility for coverage.

If I send a worker home to prevent them from getting sick, do I need to report it to WCB?

No. If there is no illness, there is no claim. There’s no need to report this to WCB.

What happens when I submit a COVID-19 claim?

Like any other workplace illness or injury claim, we must determine whether your worker’s exposure to the disease arose out of the course of employment and was caused by an employment hazard (in this case, workplace exposure to the virus).