



Renfrew County and District Health Unit
"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"

For Immediate Release

(Pembroke, Ontario, 3:30 p.m., October 14, 2020)

Workplace Safety during Wave II of COVID-19

Wave II of COVID-19 is now adding stress on our efforts to keep the economy up and running. This should come as no surprise. We had a virtual lockdown during Wave I and the number of cases this fall will no doubt exceed those from last spring.

There have been a number of workplace outbreaks reported in Ontario and closer to home in Ottawa. In Renfrew County and District (RCD), we recently had our first workplace in which we had multiple employees who tested positive for COVID-19, all connected to the workplace. Thanks to the full cooperation from the company and the diligence of the contact tracing team at Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU), the office has been able to reopen. The structure of the business was such that only a small number of staff were exposed, and the outbreak was easily contained. Maybe next time we will not be as lucky. This experience serves as an excellent opportunity to remind everyone about the importance of strict COVID-19 prevention strategies in the workplace.

The key to workplace safety is the understanding that **the biggest risk is from staff**, the people who spend the most time on site, not clients and customers who tend to be in and out of a premise. **The most important rule is not to go to work if you have symptoms. Another important consideration is to limit your interaction with colleagues both while on the job and during breaks.**

Dr. Cushman, Acting Medical Officer of Health, RCDHU reminds us that "This has to be taken extremely seriously. Yes, there is pressure on people to work, not only to bring home a paycheck but equally to make a meaningful and important contribution to the workplace. Remember that not paying close attention to symptoms can have much greater consequences in terms of shutting a business down and putting an entire team out of work."

Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to keep workers and workplaces safe and free of hazards, including COVID-19. It is critical that employers take responsibility for ensuring the appropriate measures are in place. **Employers should:**

- Direct employees to complete the COVID-19 [self-assessment](#) tool **daily** to help monitor for symptoms and proper guidance.
- Support employees who are instructed by the self-assessment tool to remain at home and self-isolate. Ensure the employee contacts the Renfrew County Virtual Triage Assessment Centre (RC VTAC) at 1-844-727-6404 to book an appointment for testing. If

the employee does not want to be tested, they must self-isolate for 14 days and can return to work when it has been 24 hours since symptoms started improving.

- Send employees home from work if they are sick or symptomatic and instruct them to remain at home, [self-isolate](#) and contact the Renfrew County Virtual Triage Assessment Centre to book an appointment for testing.
- Ensure that employees wear appropriate personal protective equipment at all times, including masks and facial coverings, practice physical distancing, thorough hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Ensure that commonly touched surfaces are regularly [disinfected](#) throughout the workplace.
- Consider policies and practices such as teleworking arrangements, flexible hours, staggering start times for employees, use of email and teleconferencing.
- Prepare a contingency plan for possible increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in employees and their family members.

Employees must work with their employers to adhere to all local public health measures. If a worker has concerns that a co-worker has COVID-19 symptoms, the worker should raise concerns with a supervisor, joint health and safety committee, or a health and safety representative. Employees who have questions or concerns regarding safety in the workplace can contact the [Health & Safety Contact Centre](#) at 1-877-202-0008.

The [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#) investigates all complaints related to [workplace health and safety](#) under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) (OHSA) and works closely with the Ministry of Health and Public Health Ontario to provide support, advice and enforcement, as needed. Failure of the employer to comply with the OHSA and its regulations could result in a stop-work order upon inspection by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

For more information, visit RCDHU's website at <https://www.rcdhu.com/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-2/> or call 613-735-8654 or 1-800-267-1097.

- 30 -

Renfrew County and District Health Unit
Fax: 613-735-3067
media@rcdhu.com
www.rcdhu.com