

## COVID-19 FAQ #28 Responding to COVID-19

In FAQ #28, you will find information on: sick leave; contact tracing; hot weather; ergonomics; member mental health; and the rise of hate crimes.

**Need a refresher on ETFO's last COVID-19 update?**

Here's a link to [COVID-19 FAQ #27](#), which was a special issue for special education staff.

Stay informed about your health and safety at work at [etfohealthandsafety.ca](http://etfohealthandsafety.ca).

### Frequently Asked Questions

**I'm an ETFO member who works in daily occasional assignments. Are there any supports available for me if I get COVID-19 and can't work?**

Employees who are covered under the *Employment Standards Act* and who do not have access to a sick leave plan qualify for the new temporary paid leave entitlement under Bill 284, *COVID-19 Putting Workers First Act, 2021*. This leave would allow occasional employees who, for example, are scheduled to work and become ill due to COVID-19, to access up to three paid leave days. These days do not need to be taken consecutively, and are available retroactively to April 19, 2021, until Sept. 25, 2021.

This entitlement can also be accessed for other COVID-19-related issues outlined in Bill 284. Employers may require an employee to provide evidence, reasonable in the circumstances, to claim the entitlement; however, an employer is not permitted to require the employee to provide a certificate (i.e., medical note) in order to be eligible for the leave.

Employees who access this paid leave would receive the lesser amount of either their normal rate of pay or \$200 per day.

To apply for this entitlement retroactively, an employee will need to inform their employer in writing by May 13, 2021.

More detailed [information about Bill 284](#) can be found on the Goldblatt Partners LLP website.

### **What about longer-term absences due to COVID-19?**

The Government of Canada currently offers the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB). Information regarding the CRSB can be accessed [here](#).

### **When there was a COVID-19 case in my special education classroom, no one was asked to self-isolate. How are they doing contact tracing?**

Contact tracing is a process that identifies all close and high-risk contacts of a positive case of COVID-19, and instructs them to self-isolate. It is done by public health units with information provided to them by principals. As the number of COVID-19 cases has risen, so has the work associated with contact tracing. It is not being done as quickly as it should in order to stop the spread. There have been many instances of classes going back to school after having been exposed to a case and before contact tracing has been completed.

If you are in a class where there has been a positive case and it seems that contact tracing has not been done, you have legitimate concerns about safety that should be raised with your principal and the public health unit. Please note that ETFO members who have exercised their right to refuse unsafe work in these situations have often been successful in having classes closed until contact tracing is completed.

### **My school doesn't have air conditioning and I'm concerned about teaching on hot days while wearing a mask and a face shield. What can I do?**

Even before COVID-19, ETFO was advocating for the proper maintenance and upgrading of school facilities, including HVAC systems in schools. If your school doesn't already have a site-specific Hot Weather Action Plan, one should be developed and any plan that already exists should be revised with current conditions in mind.

Fans are often used in schools without air conditioning, but when dealing with an airborne hazard like COVID-19, care must be taken. Public Health Ontario has indicated that some of the directions they provided for long-term care homes are also relevant in the education sector:

- Ensure that the fan is cleaned regularly, including the blades.
- Do not use fans in closed rooms with no doors or windows open.
- Fans should be used to create airflow, not be directed at face level.
- Fans should not be placed at floor level.

### **Now that I'm teaching virtually again, my back issues have returned. How can I avoid this?**

First, remember that any time you get sick or hurt at work, this is an occupational illness/injury and it should be reported. This is true even when you are doing your work, during the work day, away from the workplace.

Here are some [tips and strategies](#) from the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers to help you avoid musculoskeletal injuries.

### **How has working during the pandemic affected ETFO members' mental health?**

The impact of the pandemic on ETFO members was measured by a survey done in November and December 2020. The results paint a stark picture of how working through COVID-19 has affected members' mental health. Survey details are available on the [ETFO Health and Safety website](#).

### **Hate crimes have risen during the pandemic. How can I address this in my classroom?**

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and well before, ETFO has provided members with information and strategies to address the rising disparities amongst marginalized groups in workplaces and school communities.

Factors contributing to the rise in hate crimes include the anti-Asian rhetoric regarding the pandemic origins in China, and the police murder of George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis and other acts of police brutality against Black individuals. Incidents of discrimination and hate crimes are exacerbated as individuals have turned to the anonymity of the internet to fuel hatred and organize attacks.

School and workplace communities in Ontario are directly and indirectly impacted by these events. Members can address issues of racism and other oppressive acts with students in developmentally, age-appropriate ways. Here are some strategies and tips\*:

- Discussions about racism can re-traumatize students with lived experience. Ensure you are integrating mental health strategies that foster student-well-being, and seek support, resources and advice from administration on how to facilitate trauma-informed, supportive conversations with students.
- Use age-appropriate pictures, story books and texts to bring issues into the space and engage in learning about diverse perspectives, power, racism and other forms of discrimination.
- Provide accurate historical and current context to issues.
- Explain that racism and other forms of discrimination are not just done by 'bad people or a few bad apples.' It has structural implications and is very much a part of all institutions, whether in education, the justice system, immigration or media.
- Address micro-aggressions and unconscious bias when they are present and noticed.
- Encourage students and colleagues to be brave in calling out racism and other forms of oppression. The quote 'silence is complicity' holds weight in this current space of working through allyship and solidarity, and dismantling white supremacy and colonialism.

\*Source: [9 tips teachers can use when talking about racism](#)

**What resources are available to help me address racism and other forms of oppression in my school and/or classroom?**

Here are some materials, including ETFO resources, developed for educators:

- [2SLGBTQ+ Resources](#)
- [Addressing Anti-Asian Racism: A Resource for Educators](#)
- [Asian and South Asian Heritage Month Resources](#)
- [Anti-Racism and the Fight for Black Lives Video Series](#)
- [Les Hisnoires Black Canadian Curriculum Resources](#)
- [Respond and Rebuild: CRRP Lessons](#)
- [School Mental Health Ontario](#)
- [White Privilege Lesson Plans](#)

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