

Important ETFO Update #7: Responding to COVID-19

May 7, 2020

In update #7 on COVID-19 related issues, you will find information related to: parental support for distance learning; synchronous learning; support for those living with violence; issues for Black Canadians and Indigenous communities; and information on Employment Insurance.

Need a refresher on ETFO's most recent COVID-19 updates?

[Download a PDF version of FAQ update #4](#)

[Download a PDF version of FAQ update #5](#)

[Download a PDF version of FAQ update #6](#)

Stay informed at etfo.ca/link/covid19

The information in this newsletter is up to date to the best of our ability and current as of 11:00 a.m. on May 7, 2020. With the situation rapidly changing, ETFO will continue to provide weekly updates on our response to COVID-19.

Keep reading, stay safe, and please wash your hands!

Frequently Asked Questions

Parents are asking me how to help their children navigate distance learning. What can I tell them?

ETFO has posted a fact sheet on its COVID-19 web page, [Supporting Students and Families with Distance Learning](#). Along with tips on communicating with parents, it offers ideas for parents on establishing 'school' routines and hands-on curriculum activities and skills.

I am being asked to conduct synchronous learning sessions with students. Am I required to do this?

Across the province, there are growing inconsistencies with the direction school boards are providing to employees regarding the use of synchronous (real-time) online



learning. ETFO and other affiliates continue to express concern to the Ministry of Education about its use. Many concerns have not been addressed, including equitable access to technology for staff and students, access to technology in households where there may be more than one student or a family member working from home, lack of strong Wi-Fi and increased risk to members who may be subject to allegations of misconduct while participating in virtual learning sessions.

While ETFO discourages members from participating in synchronous online activities with students, members should carefully consider the following issues prior to any participation. Where no policy or guidelines exist within a school board, members should contact their ETFO local or Professional Relations Services (PRS) staff to discuss their concerns.

Training from school boards:

Fulsome training should include components on:

- Strategies related to safety and security including ways to protect ‘meetings’ and how to shut down meetings immediately should something inappropriate be said or take place;
- Clear explanations about issues such as what to do about reporting an inappropriate incident, and how to deal with students who may have been witness to harassment or racism;
- Strategies to immediately address any non-students such as parents/ guardians/ older siblings who appear to be in the ‘meeting’; and
- Considerations for where such ‘meetings’ take place in the home and awareness of art work, books and other items or people in the background deemed inappropriate.

Equity issues:

Synchronous learning may heighten equity issues. Not all students have access to a quiet place in their home to participate in synchronous learning nor may they want to ‘invite’ other students to where they live.

Professional boundaries:

Members must carefully consider how they will maintain professional boundaries during interactions with students while providing instruction. Cell phones make it very easy for students or parents to tape online interactions that could then be shared via social media with others. Recordings could be modified to change the tone, intent or message of what was said. Members must be extra vigilant and cautious when online with students. Allegations against educators must be investigated by boards and causes significant stress for the members involved.

Student inclusion:

In the event that not all students can participate synchronously, you may need to plan asynchronous experiences for the same learning, creating double the workload. Members are already reporting the long hours of planning and connecting with students

and parents needed to support distance learning. Member well-being remains important during the pandemic.

For additional resources, please see the following:

ETFO: [PRs Matters Bulletin #108](#)

Ontario College of Teachers: [Video Conferencing Guide](#)

What support measures are in place for people who are living in homes where there is violence?

Violence in the home is a reality for many women, children, men and 2SLGBTQ+ peoples. Many students may have already been witness to violence or experience it on a regular basis. Canada's Minister for Women and Gender Equality reported [a 20 to 30 per cent increase in rates of gender-based violence and domestic violence](#) in some regions of the country due to the COVID-19 crisis, with some shelters in Ontario experiencing a 400% increase in calls for help.

Various organizations are providing support at this critical time such as:

- [Canadian shelters and organizations](#)
- [Ontario crisis helplines](#)
- [Kids Help Phone](#)
- The 519, an organization serving the needs of the LGBTQ community, has [compiled essential supports and services](#)
- [Western University's The Learning Network](#)

How does COVID-19 compound issues of anti-Black racism in society? What can I as an ETFO member do to educate myself and support Black students and their families facing compounded issues?

COVID-19 is affecting us all but as with any crisis, the most marginalized communities are being disproportionately put at risk in a variety of ways. The historical nature of anti-Black racism produces layers of oppression that intersect with social determinants such as socio-economic class and housing. Black Canadians face additional stressors and challenges including dealing with the effects of gentrification and under-resourced communities. These disparities become much more glaring during a pandemic. The generic, "response for all" from the federal government speaks to the need for data to quantify these issues so that they can be addressed specifically.

ETFO members can seek to educate themselves on the issue of anti-Black racism to better understand the ways in which it can and should impact their practice. That will provide an understanding of the oppression that Black students and their families face during the pandemic as well as when we return to our post-COVID-19 reality.

Below are links that provide additional context on COVID-19 and the Black community:

Alliance for Healthier Communities: [Letter to Minister Elliott on expanded testing](#).

U of T News: [“Coronavirus is not the ‘great equalizer’ – race matters: U of T expert”](#).

CTV: [“Does COVID-19 discriminate? This is how some Canadians are harder hit”](#)

Ontario Federation of Labour: [OFL demands equity lens be applied to recovery efforts](#)

How does COVID-19 affect remote Indigenous communities?

For Indigenous communities, the harsh effect of this pandemic stems significantly from the disparities and inequities experienced historically because of colonialism and anti-Indigenous racism. In Canada, over 100 Indigenous communities [do not have access to clean drinking water](#). The Covid-19 pandemic has made some of the issues and situations more acute. For example, overcrowded housing makes practicing physical distancing impossible. In some communities, there already exists a lack of access to healthcare services where nursing stations are not equipped for a COVID-19 pandemic, and access to fresh and affordable food is difficult. COVID-19 can leave devastating impacts in these vulnerable communities.

According to the Canadian Government, “As of April 28, [Indigenous Services Canada is aware of 118 confirmed positive COVID-19 tests on First Nations reserves in provinces.](#)” With the limited resources available, the government has outlined [information on preventative measures](#) and many communities have also closed off access to the public from entering their communities. With the pandemic, every community on the globe needs to follow the self-isolation and social distancing parameters. Understanding the inequities that Indigenous Peoples in Canada are challenged with during a pandemic provides information on the reconciliation work that needs to be done in Canada.

For additional resources see:

United Nations. (2020): [COVID-19 and Indigenous peoples](#).

Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. (2020): [Indigenous Peoples and COVID-19](#).

Where can I find information on Employment Insurance?

ETFO has provided information and frequently asked questions for members on the [Canada Emergency Response Benefit vs. Employment Insurance](#).

The Government of Canada has also provided questions and answers on the [Canada Emergency Response Benefit](#).

Resources and Financial Support Links

[Apply for the Provincial Child Benefit](#). Eligible parents will receive \$200 for children up to 12 and \$250 for children with special needs up to age 21.

[Apply for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit Program](#)
[Learn more about the CERB at \[etfo.ca/link/FAQ-CERB\]\(https://etfo.ca/link/FAQ-CERB\)](#)

[COVID-19 Self-assessment Tools](#) tool to determine what steps you should take should you exhibit symptoms.

For updates, please check ETFO's dedicate webpage at **etfo.ca/link/covid19**