



**Ontario  
Health**

## **Toolkit for Assessing and Supporting Return to Work for Long-Term Care and Retirement Home Employees**

### **How to Use this Toolkit:**

This toolkit has been developed for HR and Occupational Health and Safety staff and management in LTC and retirement homes to support return to work discussions with front-line healthcare workers who have been off work with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 or for other reasons, in accordance with Ontario [Guidelines for the Health Sector](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx) ([http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019\\_guidance.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx)), including the [Quick Reference Public Health Guidance on Testing and Clearance](#) .

**This toolkit is designed to offer suggestions and advice to help decision-making; it is not intended to replace or supersede government directives or public health measures, organizational policies or labour relations/collective agreement provisions. Adapted approaches may be required to address unique, organizational or other exceptional circumstances and conditions.**

It is not intended to apply to exceptional circumstances defined in the Quick Reference Public Health Guidance on Testing and Clearance as “...where clinical care would be severely compromised without additional staffing and an earlier return to work of a COVID-19 positive health care worker may be considered under work self-isolation recognizing the staff may still be infectious.”

**May 15, 2020**

**Purpose:**

Ontario’s long-term care and retirement home employees are an essential service that is critical to the successful management of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the frontline of this global crisis, we need our teams to feel confident stepping forward to care for residents in a safe and healthy working environment.

The common tools, scripts and checklists included in this guide will support Human Resources/ Occupational Health and Safety staff and management during the COVID-19 pandemic at long-term care (LTC) and retirement homes in assessing whether absent healthcare workers can return to work, and if so, how to support their safe return.

It is designed to offer suggestions and resources to help long-term care and retirement homes have well-informed, productive discussions with absent healthcare workers to understand their individual circumstances and to provide information on organizational measures to ensure a safe and healthy working environment. The content is generic and should be adapted to address individual and organizational circumstances, including reasons for absence and organizational practices, policies and provisions.

It reflects and supports current government directives and public health measures, which may evolve in this rapidly changing environment and require further adaptation by the organization.

### **Included in this Toolkit:**

- A. Guiding principles
- B. Tips for discussions with staff off work due to “other” reasons
- C. Scripts and checklists for discussion with absent healthcare worker
- D. Protocols for return to work
- E. Workplace restoration tips for managers
  - APPENDIX: Hand-out for returning healthcare workers
  - Links to:
    - [Work Refusals Related to COVID-19](#)
    - [Workplace Accommodation for At-Risk Front-Line Health Care Providers](#)
    - [COVID-19: Temporary Pandemic Pay](#)

## **A. Guiding Principles:**

- Long-term care and retirement home healthcare workers play an essential role in the continuity of care to residents. Healthcare workers are valuable assets to their organizations and their attendance at work makes a real and valued difference to residents and families.
- The stabilization of staffing levels in long-term care and retirement homes is a key priority, with a focus on ensuring that all employees can come to work in a safe and healthy working environment.
- Long-term care and retirement homes will make every effort to return absent employees to work as soon as possible, with all precautions as necessary to protect their health and safety.
- In the event that an absent healthcare worker refuses to return to work after being cleared, without legal justification, the organization should consider appropriate responses in accordance with organizational policies, practices and labour relations/collective agreement provisions.

## **B. Tips for discussions with staff off work due to “other” reasons**

There are many reasons why healthcare workers may be off work, in addition to COVID-related illness. Workers may be off due to other medical issues, issues related to childcare or elder care, stress, or fear of working in dangerous conditions. Here are some tips to help guide your discussion with those workers:

- Gather as much information as you can about the reason for an employee’s absence prior to the discussion
- Gather as much information as you can about the policies, procedures and protocols that are now in place in the organization to help ensure a safe and healthy workplace
- Tailor your conversation to the specific circumstances of the employee and the organization’s COVID response
  - Address employee’s concerns to the extent possible
  - Reiterate safety measures now in place at the LTC or retirement home

The scripts that follow can be used during discussions with workers off work for any reason and should be adapted to the individual circumstances accordingly.

## **C. Scripts and Checklists for Return to Work Discussion with Absent Healthcare Worker**

### **1) *Initial Email to Advise Healthcare Worker that Discussion will Occur:***

*Dear NAME OF HEALTHCARE WORKER,*

*This is an unprecedented time for those of us working and living in Long Term Care. NAME OF LTC /RETIREMENT HOME is working to ensure the safety and well-being of all our staff and residents.*

*Our occupational health and safety department/NAME OF HOSPITAL (if applicable) is helping us by taking on the assessment of absences and ensuring a safe return to work. You will receive a call within the next 3 days from a member of the team to discuss your current absence.*

*Infection, prevention and control measures are in place at LTC/RETIREMENT HOME, along with personal protective equipment to ensure everyone's safety. Upon your return to work, your manager will take you through a review of the important aspects of safety requirements including the proper use of PPE.*

*We look forward to our discussion and to welcoming you back to work.*

## 2) *Script for Return to Work Discussion\**:

*Prior to commencing a discussion with the healthcare employee, if necessary, consider advising the local Bargaining Unit representative in accordance with collective agreement requirements. Additionally, consider who would be best suited to reach out to the employee, such as someone from management or human resources/occupational health and safety who has an existing relationship and is familiar with the employee. Where appropriate, consider having that person facilitate the discussion.*

*Hello, may I speak with \_\_\_\_\_.*

*My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am calling from NAME OF LTC / RETIREMENT HOME.*

*We are working to help staff who have been off on COVID-19 related sick leave or for other reasons get back to work safely. We are committed to keeping you and our residents safe by minimizing the spread of COVID-19.*

*I know this is a stressful time, and I assure you we are working closely with public health, Ontario Health, and all staff to ensure your health and safety comes first.*

*Questions:*

1. *How are you feeling?*
2. *When was your last shift?*
3. *IF OFF FOR COVID-RELATED SICK LEAVE:*
  - a. *Do you have any current symptoms? (probe for fever, cough, shortness of breath, feeling more tired or weak than normal, etc.)*
  - b. *Have you been tested for COVID-19? (if so, where were you tested? And do you have your results?)*
4. *IF OFF FOR OTHER REASON:*
  - a. *Has your reason for being off (e.g., childcare or elder care issues, stress, concern about unsafe workplace) been resolved?*
  - b. *Is there anything else we can do to help?*

**<Refer to the following Assessment Checklist for Reason for Absence conversation>**

\* This script can be used by a hospital carrying out this function on behalf of an LTC or retirement home.

**3) Assessment Checklist:**

General Information			
Employee Name	Call Date & Time	Employee Role	Site
Last Name, First Name	DD/MM/YYYY		

Contact Established	Employee's Manager	Last Shift Worked
Select One: <input type="checkbox"/> Spoke with Employee <input type="checkbox"/> Spoke with Other <input type="checkbox"/> Voicemail Left Requesting Call Back <input type="checkbox"/> No Answer / No voicemail available / Other	Last Name, First Name	DD/MM/YYYY

Return to Work Status
Select One: <input type="checkbox"/> Off Work for Medical Reasons (COVID Related) *PLEASE COMPLETE COVID SECTION BELOW* <input type="checkbox"/> Off Work for Medical Reasons (Non-COVID Related) <input type="checkbox"/> Off work for other reasons (indicate reason in comments section below) <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> Work Refusal under OHSA <input type="checkbox"/> Resignation

Comments / Details of Return to Work Status

COVID Related Information			
COVID-19 Symptoms (Please provide details in Comments section below)			
Symptomatic?	Onset of Symptoms	Symptoms Resolved?	Date Symptoms Resolved?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	DD/MM/YYYY	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	DD/MM/YYYY

Did Employee Receive a Nasopharyngeal Swab?	Date of Swab	Place Swab Performed	Test Result?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	DD/MM/YYYY		Select One: <input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative <input type="checkbox"/> Indeterminate <input type="checkbox"/> Pending (if pending, expected date of results)
Eligible date of return: DD/MM/YYYY			

Comments / Details of Symptoms

Summary of Call
<b>Can Employee be Returned To Work?</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>IF EMPLOYEE IS DEEMED <u>NOT FIT</u> TO RETURN TO WORK, END CONVERSATION HERE. SET A DATE FOR A FOLLOW UP DISCUSSION BASED ON CURRENT EMPLOYEE STATUS.</b>

**4) Script for Closing the Call if Employee Meets Criteria for Return to Work:**

*As you are now cleared to return to work, your manager will be following up with you shortly about your next scheduled shift. Here are a few things to know:*

- 1) Your health and safety are our highest priority. All staff will be fully equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment as per current government directives.*
- 2) Your manager will review all protocols that have changed since you last worked including reviewing current infection control practices before you start your next shift.*
- 3) Enhanced cleaning is already underway at the home.*
- 4) The Ontario government is providing frontline team members with a temporary pandemic payment. This includes a \$4 per hour premium worked on top of existing hour wages. Team members working over 100 hours per month would receive lump sum payments of \$250 per month for each up until August 13, 2020. This applies to both LTC and RH team members.*
- 5) If the organization has an EAP: Along with your family members, you have access to our Employee Assistance Program (EAP). [Provide them with contact information if appropriate].*

*You are a part of our extended family and our residents greatly miss you and ask how you are doing. You play a critical role in how our residents experience their day. The care and support you provide the residents greatly impact their overall well-being. Now more than ever, we need YOU to provide the high quality of care and support we pride ourselves on.*

*Finally, let us know if you require any support with any other challenge such as childcare, transportation, amending shift start/end times, etc. to help get you back to work.*

*Do you have any questions that I can answer for you?*

NOTE: Some employees may not be immediately available to take on the next scheduled shift but are prepared to commit to recommence employment a day or two later as they make arrangements for things like child or elder care. This should be viewed positively and accommodated in securing a commitment to a fixed return date.

**5) *If Employee Refuses to Return to Work:***

In the event the absent employee refuses to return to work after they have been deemed fit to return, the LTC/retirement home may choose to take a variety of actions, which should be carefully considered. Options may include placing the employee on an unpaid leave of absence or other disciplinary actions as appropriate. The treatment determined should be scaled to fit the employee's actions and the policies, practices and collective agreement provisions in place in the LTC/retirement home.

If applicable and appropriate, consider reaching out to the union business representative to assist in our efforts to return those employees who have removed themselves from the workplace for other reasons.

Take careful notes of all return to work discussions. What is said in the course of these discussions may be raised in a future grievance arbitration or legal proceeding. It may be helpful to consult with a Human Resources or Legal professional prior to making any final decision



#### **D. Protocols for Return to Work:**

This information is based on the following:

- Ontario Directive #5 for Hospitals within the meaning of the Public Hospitals Act and Long – Term Care Homes within the meaning of the Long – Term Care Homes Act, 2007:  
[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/directives/public\\_hospitals\\_act.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/directives/public_hospitals_act.pdf)
- Ontario Directive #3 for Long – Term Care Homes under the Long – Term Care Homes Act, 2007:  
[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/directives/LTC\\_H\\_HPPA.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/directives/LTC_H_HPPA.pdf)
- Relevant Guidance for the Health Sector:  
[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019\\_guidance.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx)

Specifically, to ensure your health and safety, all required precautions, procedures and infection prevention and control measures will be strictly observed. You will receive detailed instructions when you return to work, including:

- Appropriate and safe utilization of and training on personal protective equipment
- Diligent adherence to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and other infection prevention and control measures
- Practicing of physical distancing with other healthcare workers and residents to the extent practical
- Avoiding close contact with others when travelling to and from work and between shifts
- Guidelines for self-monitoring

#### **E. Workplace Restoration Tips for Managers:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has put immense pressure on long-term care and retirement homes experiencing unprecedented levels of absent staff for prolonged periods of time. As a result, staff shortages may have an impact on employee morale and overall engagement levels. As staff return to work, management will provide a key role in promoting and restoring a respectful work environment to normal operations. Given that every workforce will have had varied experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, these are guidelines only. Organizations are encouraged to review these guidelines in addition to existing organizational workplace restoration processes/policies and implement where appropriate.

### Workplace restoration tips for managers:

- Ensure all returning employees are informed about any new job routines, workplace policies and protocols
- Consider from an organizational culture perspective, ways to bring staff together in order to engage and inform them (e.g., special bulletins from leadership, all-staff town halls)
- Frequently communicate with staff and set aside one-on-one time to check-in with employees.
- Resume regular team meetings and make staff aware of all resources that are available to support them (e.g. Employee Assistance Programs).
- Ensure all staff are made aware of health and safety protocols including availability of personal protective equipment and infection, prevention and control measures that have been implemented to keep them safe.
- Be sensitive to the hardship the pandemic has caused all employees (e.g. employees who were off sick or on leave, employees who were personally impacted by a close friend or family who was sick or employees who remained at work, cared for a sick resident, and/or experienced a high stress work environment). Recognize that employees will have had different experiences throughout the pandemic and will therefore respond differently in similar situations
- Communicate clearly to all staff your operational expectations and continuously reinforce these expectations.
- Develop a plan to re-orient staff to the work environment and focus on priorities in order to resume business operations.
- Monitor workplace relationships and address issues as they arise. If required, provide remedial education or training to employees and/or use Alternative Dispute Resolution approaches to help restore and promote positive working relationships. Monitor future behaviour.
- Prepare positive key messages to share with your team such as:
  - Acknowledge that the pandemic has been difficult and stressful
  - Together, we can move forward, ensuring a healthy, safe, fair and productive workplace
  - Although that it may be difficult, we all have a responsibility to restore relationships and maintain a respectful workplace
  - Remind staff that we all play an essential role in the continuity of operations
  - Management is available to meet with you/your teams to discuss concerns
  - Avoid remarks that might spark conflict, assumptions, anger or criticism.
- Manage according to your organizations return-to-work protocol, as well as existing management policy and practice.
- Consider conducting debrief sessions with all staff after first shift when a healthcare worker returns to work to check in on how they are feeling and whether there is anything further management can do to support them.
- Psycho-social supports – in addition to your Employee Assistance Programs, consider other sources of support for employees, such as the Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care. The CLRI web site has a range of tools and resources for the health and well-being of team members that are available to all LTC homes and employees.: <https://clri-ltc.ca/covid19/#section1>

## APPENDIX: Handout for Returning Healthcare Workers

Welcome back to work. As an employee of (INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME), you play an essential role in the continuity of care to our residents. You are a valued asset to our team and the work that you do makes a real and valued difference. We recognize that this is a stressful time and want to assure you that we are closely following all required Public Health directives to ensure your safety and the safety of our residents is a top priority.

This handout has been developed to support your return to work. In addition to the protocols listed below the following resources are available to you, should you require any support as you transition back to the workplace:

- 1) Management – Your direct manager is available to answer any questions or address any concerns you may have now that you have returned to work. Your manager will keep you informed of any operational changes that may have occurred while you were off.
- 2) Human Resources – Please contact (insert HR CONTACT) should you require additional information
- 3) If applicable - Employee and Family Assistance Program – (insert plan information) Your EFAP is a confidential and voluntary support service that can assist you with a variety services including support related to return to work
- 4) *(INSERT ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION SPECIFIC RESOURCES)*

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- Ontario Directive #3 for Long – Term Care Homes under the Long – Term Care Homes Act, 2007:  
[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/directives/LTCH\\_HPPA.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/directives/LTCH_HPPA.pdf)
- Relevant Guidance for the Health Sector:  
[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019\\_guidance.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx)

Specifically, to ensure your health and safety, all required precautions, procedures and infection prevention and control measures will be strictly observed. It is your responsibility to follow and uphold all policies and procedures. You will receive detailed instructions when you return to work, including:

- Appropriate and safe utilization of and training on personal protective equipment
- Diligent adherence to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and other infection prevention and control measures
- Practicing of physical distancing with other healthcare workers and residents to the extent practical
- Avoiding close contact with others when travelling to and from work and between shifts
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**LINKS:**

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- [Workplace Accommodation for At-Risk Front-Line Health Care Providers](#)
- [COVID-19: Temporary Pandemic Pay](#)