



COVID-19: Employee FAQs

Compilation and Updates – November 30, 2020

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Since the beginning of COVID-19 in March, multiple FAQ documents have been prepared and posted on the [COVID-19 Hub](#) to help address questions commonly asked of Human Resources, Occupational Health Safety and Wellness, Compensation & Benefits and Payroll. As we all recognize, addressing and responding to COVID-19 has continued to change and evolve. Many of the situations and scenarios have changed over time and with that so has some of the answers to questions. This document is a compilation of previous questions and answers as well as updated responses to questions that continue to be relevant to COVID-19, self-isolation, household travel, compensation, vacation, working arrangements, handling child and elder care, back to school, etc.

If you have questions that are not addressed in this updated FAQ, please raise them with your manager and/or contact your local Human Resources Office.

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Questions about my vacation and requesting time off

Now that we are in a new fiscal year (April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021) does this change how vacation, holiday, time in lieu requests are being addressed?

No. Generally speaking, this does not change how leave requests are handled. You should make any requests to your manager as per usual processes and they will be considered in accordance with the collective agreements.

If you are wondering specifically about vacations that were approved, please discuss with your manager to confirm if it is able to proceed as approved.

If vacation is cancelled, your manager will discuss this with you and the provisions of the collective agreements will be followed. See the question below about cancellation of already approved vacation.

If you have a new vacation request, managers will consider these as ad hoc vacation requests in accordance with the collective agreement taking into account operational requirements and anticipated staffing needs.

Can my manager cancel my already booked/approved vacation time?

Vacation time is not a 100% guarantee at any time. Each collective agreement has some provisions permitting the employer to cancel vacation or recall from vacation. This decision is not exercised lightly.

If your vacation is cancelled by the employer, all applicable provisions of the collective agreement will be followed:

- Reimbursement (with proof) of costs unable to be recovered. Any employee who has had vacation cancelled is expected to exhaust all methods and options to recover associated costs/fees from the airline, travel agency, hotel, etc. Many companies are allowing full refunds, travel credits, etc. due to the unique circumstances related to COVID-19.
- In addition, the vacation time is credited back to the vacation bank and special carry over provisions will be permitted for this vacation time not used.
- All hours worked during the period of vacation that was cancelled is compensated at 2X regular pay.

What happens if I am planning to travel during my planned vacation period?

If you are scheduled to be on vacation over the coming months, please see your manager to discuss the vacation plans. It should be noted that a manager may deny vacation requests where there is a reasonable operational concern to limit the number of people on vacation.

Non-essential travel outside of the Atlantic Bubble is strongly discouraged as you will be required to self-isolate for 14 days upon your return and therefore unable to report to work. While some employees may be able to work from home many will not due to the nature of their work.

If an employee is unable to report to work for a further 14 days beyond their approved vacation leave and cannot work from home, employees must request an additional leave of absence for the 14 days. This creates an additional operational impact that must be taken into account. Therefore, on a case by case basis, managers may not be able to approve the additional leave and could also need to cancel the vacation of an employee whose decision to travel would result in a 14-day self-isolation period.

If your vacation is cancelled by the employer, all applicable provisions of the collective agreement will be followed:

- Reimbursement (with proof) of costs unable to be recovered. Any employee who has had vacation cancelled is expected to exhaust all methods and options to recover associated costs/fees from the airline, travel agency, hotel, etc. Many companies are allowing full refunds, travel credits, etc. due to the unique circumstances related to COVID-19.
- In addition, the vacation time is credited back to the vacation bank and special carry over provisions will be permitted for this vacation time not used.
- All hours worked during the period of vacation that was cancelled is compensated at 2X regular pay.

I have made changes to my plans around already approved vacation. Can I request to cancel my vacation to be used at a later date?

While managers are doing whatever they can to avoid cancelling already approved vacation leave, there may be cases that due to operational requirements, the number of people on self-isolation, challenges with covering shifts, etc. where they will need to cancel vacation. If that happens it will be done in accordance with the collective agreements.

If you have approved vacation and are reconsidering your plans, you should discuss this with your manager. While there are no provisions in the collective agreements for employees to cancel vacation once it has been approved, we understand these are very extraordinary and unique circumstances. Managers would consider such a request on a case by case basis depending on the department's operational needs and disruption to work schedules in place. If you make the decision to cancel your travel plans, the Employer is not responsible for any

compensation resulting from the cancellation of vacation (i.e. hotels, flights, trip expenses, etc.).

How is Nova Scotia Health handling new requests for vacation time?

A manager may deny vacation requests where there is a reasonable operational concern to limit the number of people on vacation. With the changing and evolving situation related to COVID-19, requests for vacation time over the coming months must be considered in relation to anticipated operational needs and possible increases in COVID-19 cases, sick leave, self-isolation, etc. due to the second wave. Managers will need to make a determination based on the most current information available.

Questions about my pay

How will I be paid if I am directed to self-isolate for a 14-day period?

If you have COVID-19 symptoms, you will access sick leave for the time that you are unable to report to work.

If you do not have COVID-19 symptoms, but have been directed by OHSW/Public Health to self-isolate, then you will be paid special leave for the time that you are unable to report to work.

How will I be paid if I test positive for COVID-19?

If you test positive for COVID-19, regular collective agreement sick leave provisions will apply.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have committed that employees will not suffer any loss of pay if they test positive for COVID-19. An employee who does not have access to 100% paid sick leave and/or has exhausted their available banks will be topped up to full pay when they have tested positive for COVID-19 (for the duration of the illness until they meet the clearance protocol to return to work). Also, we would continue to pay casual employees based on the average of their hours worked during the previous three months (six pay periods) and this would continue until they meet the OHSW clearance protocol to return to work.

How will I be paid if I'm a casual status employee without entitlement to paid sick leave if I test positive for COVID-19?

Since the start of the pandemic, we have committed that employees will not suffer any loss of pay if they test positive for COVID-19. We would continue to pay casual employees for scheduled shifts or the average of their hours worked during the previous three months (six pay

periods) whichever is greater. This would continue until they meet the clearance protocol to return to work.

Does Nova Scotia Health have information about federal government funding and relief to Canadians impacted by COVID-19?

The federal government has announced a variety of programs and relief for workers affected by COVID-19. We do not have any additional details on this other than what has been released to the general public. We encourage employees with questions on this to check out the [federal government website](#) for details. Nova Scotia Health has been working very closely with all our partners including the provincial Department of Health and Wellness, the IWK and the unions to address questions about pay, etc. A great deal of effort has been made to minimize the financial impact on employees in order to ensure employees are not experiencing loss in pay wherever possible.

Can my manager tell me to stay home if I've traveled outside of the Atlantic Bubble?

Under Public Health Order, anyone who returns to NS from outside of the Atlantic Bubble must self-isolate for 14 days. There are some specific exemptions under the [Health Protection Order](#) however this does not mean you can automatically report to work. You should speak to your manager before returning to work if you have traveled outside of the Atlantic Bubble.

Can I be told to stay home, if I have any COVID-19 symptoms?

Yes, in order to reduce the possible spread of COVID -19 and ensure the safety of patients and other healthcare workers, you are not report to work under the following conditions:

DO NOT REPORT TO WORK AND CALL 1-833-750-0632 if you have:

A fever of 38°C OR new or worsening chronic cough

OR

two or more of the following (new/worsening):

sore throat, runny nose, unexplained headache, shortness of breath

NOTE: Healthcare workers should NOT report to work even if they are mildly symptomatic.

Questions about my work schedule

Can I work from home or make alternate work arrangements?

If you are looking for alternate work arrangements such as working from home or modified hours please discuss this with your immediate manager to see if your request can be supported.

Each request will be reviewed on a case by case basis. For more information, please review Nova Scotia Health's updates about [working from home](#) on the COVID-19 Hub.

Can I be reassigned or redeployed to another work area?

Yes. All Nova Scotia Health employees are essential and may be called upon to be reassigned to another unit/department or facility within Nova Scotia Health.

Employees in any bargaining unit may be temporarily reassigned to another existing work location or a new work site. The "reassignment area" must be within 50 km (one way) of your regular worksite if in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and 75 km (one way) of your regular worksite if outside of HRM. Employees are eligible to be reimbursed as per the Nova Scotia Health travel policy for travel costs including kms driven to travel to an alternate work location and for any parking costs incurred. Employees are also paid for the time it takes to travel to the alternate location.

You will only be reassigned to an area where you are qualified/licensed to do the required work.

Questions about available supports

What kind of supports and resources are available to me and my family?

Supports for employees and physicians are available on the [COVID-19 Hub](#) and is updated periodically as more options and services become available.

I am a casual employee. Do I have access to the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)?

Yes. All Nova Scotia Health employees have access to the EFAP.

What is the contact information for the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)?

You can access the EFAP by calling 1-800-461-5558 or online at www.worklifehealth.com

Questions about household travel and self-isolation

[Can I work from home during the 14-day isolation period?](#)

Employees who are already working from home may continue to do so for the self-isolation period and will be paid for regular hours worked. Any new ad-hoc request to work from home must be made to your manager and will be considered on a case by case basis subject to operational requirements.

[How will I be compensated if I need to self-isolate due to a household member returning from travel from outside the Atlantic Provinces before November 17?](#)

In light of the short notice of this new isolation requirement, as previously communicated in **Coronavirus Update #116**, employees who are asymptomatic and were not able to make alternate arrangements, a grace period was put in effect from November 9-17. During this period, asymptomatic health care workers who required leave due to the recent change in self-isolation requirements would be paid special leave for the duration of the self-isolation period. For example, if your household member returned on November 14, you will receive special leave pay for any scheduled shifts during your 14-day self-isolation period.

If you have COVID-19 symptoms, then you will access sick leave and must contact Occupational Health Safety & Wellness.

Nova Scotia Health employees call 1-833-750-0632

Continuing Care employees call 1-833-944-2413

[If I am approved for a leave, due to a household member returning from travelling outside the Atlantic Provinces after November 17 how will I be compensated during the 14-day self-isolation period?](#)

If you are unable to work from home or make alternate arrangements to avoid self-isolation, employees must request a leave of absence from their manager. If approved, the leave will be unpaid unless you are approved to use banked time you have available such as time in lieu, holiday time, and carryover and/or legacy vacation banks, as per the applicable collective agreement or Terms and Conditions of Employment.

If you are submitting a short notice vacation request outside of the vacation request period, your manager will consider the request in accordance with the collective agreement.

[Can I use sick time during the 14-day isolation period?](#)

The use of sick time is not applicable during this period unless you are symptomatic and therefore sick.

Should you develop COVID-19 symptoms, you are encouraged to contact Occupational Health Safety & Wellness.

DO NOT REPORT TO WORK AND CALL 1-833-750-0632 if you have:

A fever of 38°C OR new or worsening chronic cough

OR

two or more of the following (new/worsening):

sore throat, runny nose, unexplained headache, shortness of breath

NOTE: Healthcare workers should NOT report to work even if they are mildly symptomatic.

If you have a non-COVID related illness, please follow the regular departmental sick reporting process.

If a member of my household is exempt from self-isolation under the [Health Protection Order](#), is Nova Scotia Health going to require that I self-isolate?

There is no change for:

- “Domestic rotational worker” means a person who lives in Nova Scotia and travels to work in another province or territory on a regular schedule.
- Specialized workers required to enter Nova Scotia from outside of Atlantic Canada to perform urgent work that cannot be done by individuals from within the Atlantic provinces
- Workers who are essential to the movement of people and goods, and who must enter Nova Scotia as part of their duty requirements (such as transportation, military, first responders)
- People who have been granted exemptions by the Medical Officer of Health (such as to attend funerals or end of life visitation)

At this time, we are not requiring you to self-isolate outside of the [Health Protection Order](#).

You and your household members should monitor for symptoms as usual and contact Occupational Health Safety & Wellness if you become symptomatic.

NS Health employees call 1-833-750-0632.

Continuing Care employees call 1-833-944-2413.

Will approved vacation be cancelled in order to allow other employees to have time off due to this new self-isolation requirement?

There are no plans to cancel already approved vacation; however, vacation time is not a 100% guarantee at any time. Each collective agreement has some provisions permitting the employer to cancel vacation or recall employees from vacation. This decision is not exercised lightly and every other consideration will be made before doing so.

Can I amend my already approved vacation request in order to coordinate with the dates of my self-isolation period?

Where possible, you should attempt to align your self-isolation period with your already approved vacation period. If this is not possible, your request to amend your vacation period will be considered in accordance with the collective agreement.

Questions about childcare, family member responsibilities and self-isolation

What are the expectations for employees around childcare or eldercare arrangements?

We absolutely appreciate all the efforts that employees have been making to address their childcare and/or eldercare responsibilities given the additional pressures they have due to the closure of daycares and schools. Employees are encouraged to continue to explore options such as those outlined in the joint statement from [NSNU, CUPE and NS Health, IWK](#).

- Look to trusted members of your community who, as a result of these closures, may now be home and able to provide care for your children and/or elders (teachers, educational assistants, daycare employees, etc.).
- Reach out to university and college students who are now restricted from in-class sessions and/or are now unemployed.
- Connect with your colleagues to see if there is an opportunity to support one another and provide child care and/or eldercare for co-workers while they are required to be at work.
- Utilize any safe back-up plans that you have already put in place for childcare and/or eldercare.

Please work with your manager to consider all options. Depending on operational needs, your manager may be able to consider alternate schedules or modified work arrangements. If all options have been exhausted and there is no solution, your manager may be able to also consider the use of vacation, time in lieu, holiday time in order to cover shifts where you are unable to be at work.

What should I do if, during my shift, I am contacted by my child's school because they are ill and they need to be picked up as quickly as possible?

Please speak with your manager/supervisor to discuss your situation and determine when you are able to leave work. Given the circumstances related to COVID-19, managers will be as flexible as possible, taking into account operational requirements.

We would also ask that you do what you can to plan for such a possibility by making alternate arrangements where possible for other family members or trusted individuals to be available to pick up your child from school if needed.

[I have a child/family member that is home due to COVID-19 symptoms, can I still come to work?](#)

An employee with a child/family member self-isolating due to COVID-19 symptoms can report to work provided they are asymptomatic and have not been directly advised by OHSW or Public Health to also self-isolate.

[If my child/family member is sent home from school due to COVID-19 symptoms, do I need to report that to OHSW?](#)

No, you should be reporting this to your manager. You would only report to OHSW if you are symptomatic.

If in the past 48 hours have you had, or are you currently experiencing:

- Fever **OR** Cough (new or worsening)

OR

Two or more of the following symptoms (new or worsening)

- sore throat
- runny nose
- headache
- shortness of breath

Nova Scotia Health employees can contact the toll free OSHW line for **screening purposes ONLY** at **1-833-750-0632**.

[What happens if I am unable to report to work because I must be home to care for a child/family member that has COVID-19 symptoms and/or has tested positive for COVID-19?](#)

If you must be home to look after a sick child/family member due to COVID-19, then the usual family illness provisions would apply under the applicable Collective Agreement.

If I have a child/family member at home being tested for COVID-19 or has COVID-19, do I need to self-isolate for 14 days?

As per Public Health Guidance document "Preventing COVID-19 Spread in Schools" household contacts, including siblings, do not need to stay home if they do not have any symptoms.

If I have a child/family member at home being tested for COVID-19 or has COVID-19, do I need to be tested as well?

An employee in this situation will be directed by 811 or Public Health based on their case by case scenario.

I have a child/family member at home who has tested positive for COVID-19, do I need to self-isolate?

An employee who resides with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 would be assessed on a case by case basis. This involves contact tracing which is performed by OHSW and Public Health. Depending on the degree of contact, you may be asked to present for COVID-19 swabbing and self-isolate. In some cases, you may be permitted to return to work. Direct guidance will be provided from a Public Health or OHSW representative.