

What the Coronavirus (COVID-19) means for manufacturing workers

ABOUT CANADA'S MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Unifor represents nearly 90,000 workers in the manufacturing sector, working in a wide range of industries including auto, aerospace, speciality vehicles, shipbuilding, food and beverage and many more. The manufacturing sector has taken a significant hit over the last couple of decades, but its importance to the Canadian economy cannot be overstated. Accounting for nearly 10% of Canada's total GDP, the manufacturing sector exports over \$350 billion worth of goods yearly and employs nearly 1.7 million workers.

HOW THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR IS VULNERABLE TO COVID-19

Like all economic sectors, manufacturing is impacted by the current health pandemic. This is due to several factors, including supply and demand for specific goods and disruptions in the global supply chains. In certain cases, increased demand for goods means higher workloads at factories and hiring sprees. In others, a slowdown in global supply due to economic factors may result in temporary layoffs or production declines. At the same time, the number of workers employed in factories may raise concern about the potential for the virus to spread.

Calls for 'social distancing' in order to curb the spread of the virus are growing, but this may be difficult to execute in some facilities where

WHAT THE UNION EXPECTS FROM OUR EMPLOYERS

Full income and benefit protections

Appropriate protective gear and regular sanitizing of work tools and machines

Increased safety protocols and social distancing measures

Access to paid sick leave and no doctor's notes

Exploring alternative production of goods to meet changing demands

Explore work-sharing and other entitlements in the event of a work slowdown

workers work closely together. Employers need to ensure they have adopted individual and organizational prevention measures. Workers have the right to refuse work they feel is likely to endanger their health or that of another worker.

Furthermore, with a greater number of people self-isolating, this will reduce the demand for items considered to be 'non-essential', while other sectors such as household products and food and beverage manufacturing may see a rise in demand and production. As a result, we are seeing some industries being hit disproportionately harder during this global crisis.

WHAT LOCAL UNIONS IN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR SHOULD CONSIDER

We must ensure that our members have the full range of health and safety supports if they continue to work and full range of income and benefits supports if they are temporarily off the job. We must be proactive in protecting our manufacturing sector and look for ways to ensure that manufacturing facilities can continue producing to meet the needs of both Canadians and others around the world during this critical time. Some important measures we propose include:

- Full income and benefit protections for workers during temporary workplace shutdowns;
- Ensure workers who call in sick, quarantined or in self-isolation, receive full income assistance and eliminate the requirement to provide a doctor's note. Job-protected paid leave should also be provided if a worker is required to care for an ill or quarantined family member;
- Whenever possible, develop and implement physical distancing and safety protocols as well as increasing access to appropriate protective gear such as gloves and masks;
- Employers must include rigorous cleaning and sanitation procedures in their facilities to reduce risks of surface contamination, which includes disinfecting tools, equipment and machinery. Workers must also have adequate access to hand sanitizing equipment;
- Employers experiencing a reduction in product demand should work with the Union and government partners to explore ways in manufacturing alternative goods that are in higher need and that has the potential to be produced at the same facility. In the event a work slow down must occur, union and employer should discuss the merits of the work-sharing program.

Unifor has launched a hub for member information about the pandemic at unifor.org/COVID19 and encourages members to check the site regularly for updates.

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