

# What the Coronavirus (COVID-19) means for media workers

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## ABOUT CANADA'S MEDIA SECTOR

Canada's media industry is complex and multi-dimensional. It includes a diverse range of sub-sectors such as television and radio broadcasting, film production, newspapers, magazines, periodicals and printing (including graphic design, pre-press and production) as well as broad communications services, web development and other forms of creative, artistic expression.

The media industry not only reflects the cultural and community identities of Canadian people it is also an important part of Canada's overall economy, employing nearly 346,500 workers in 2017 and having generated \$52.3 billion in direct economic activity in 2016, a figure that has grown slightly (about 1 percent) over the previous year. The media industry has also been a source of good-paying, unionized jobs in Canada. Collective agreement coverage among Information and Culture sector workers has dropped from a high of 30.3 per cent (in 1997) to 24 per cent in 2017.

With 12,000 journalists and media workers in television, newspapers, magazines, news websites and film production, Unifor is Canada's largest media union. Most of Unifor's media sector members are located in the Ontario (60%) and Western (32%) regions. Quebec represents 5% of all industry members, followed by the Atlantic Region (3%).

## HOW THE MEDIA SECTOR IS VULNERABLE TO COVID-19

Canada's media sector is vulnerable to the effects of a pandemic like COVID-19, both in terms of the health and safety of media workers, and the financial health of the industry and resulting employment impacts. Frontline journalists reporting from crowded airports, hospitals, health clinics, and other public places are obviously risking infection with COVID-19 as they go about their vital work. As the pandemic crisis continues, they could also suffer from psycho-social conditions like stress, anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

### WHAT THE UNION EXPECTS FROM EMPLOYERS

Appropriate protective gear

Proper safety training

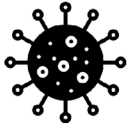
Strict personal hygiene protocol

Social distancing measures

No doctor's notes to claim sick leave benefits

Full wage replacement or other income assistance

Full benefits coverage for the duration of the crisis



At the same time, as sports leagues, sporting organizations, and other organizations cancel or delay public events, games, and entire sports seasons – either through their own decision-making or by government decree – a huge number of media workers are facing hours reductions and layoffs. Due to the event-based and freelance nature of their jobs, some of these workers might not be immediately eligible for employment insurance, paid sick days, benefits coverage, or other important entitlements.

The film and TV segments have also felt a huge impact, with many productions being delayed or postponed indefinitely. Given the unique structure of employment in film and TV production, many of the laid off workers are independent contractors or otherwise self-employed.

## HOW LOCAL UNIONS IN THE MEDIA SECTOR CAN SUPPORT MEMBERS

Local unions must ensure members have access to proper protective gear (e.g. safety gloves, masks) through their employer, especially for those in closest contact with the general public. This includes proper training on a regular basis so that workers have the best available knowledge for personal safety in what is a rapidly-changing and fluid situation.

Some media workers – journalists especially – must understand they are especially at risk due to the frontline, public-facing nature of their work. Therefore, employers must communicate strict protocols to media workers for personal hygiene as well as social distancing and safety measures with co-workers and the public.

Local unions must ensure employers and governments do not require media workers who fall ill or experience flu-like symptoms to provide doctor's notes in order to claim sick leave benefits. Any employee who is responsible enough to call in sick, self-isolate or undergo quarantine should face no financial penalty.

Local unions can urge government officials to enact wage replacement policies for impacted workers, including the expansion of eligibility for employment insurance (EI) benefits, including sick benefits. Depending on the nature of their work, some media workers may not currently be eligible for EI, so lowering or eliminating qualification thresholds may be necessary. Media workers should receive full income assistance access to paid sick days, and full benefits coverage, including financial support from employers, during this time of crisis. Any support provided by the government must take into account the unique structure and needs of the media industry and its sub-segments. Further, it is critical that media workers employed as independent contractors or through loan-out corporations receive fair and equitable support.

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

Subscribe to Unilink, the union's weekly national newsletter at [unifor.org/subscribe](https://unifor.org/subscribe) and download the Unifor mobile app on your smartphone.