

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

March 23, 2020

## ABOUT CANADA'S AIR TRANSPORTATION SECTOR

Canada's air transportation industry employs nearly 75,000 people and contributes more than \$10 billion a year to Canada's GDP. The air transportation industry plays an important role in Canadian society moving millions of people and billions in goods and services across the country and around the world on an annual basis.

Unifor represents nearly 16,000 workers in the air transportation industry including pilots, customer service representatives, air traffic controllers and flight service representatives, aircraft mechanics, airport workers and flight attendants. Our members in the industry transport both people and cargo to domestic and international locations the world over.

## HOW THE AIR TRANSPORTATION SECTOR IS VULNERABLE TO COVID-19

The air transportation industry will experience a considerable slow down as restrictions on the movement of people and potentially goods begin to take hold. On March 16, the government took the bold step of closing borders to non-Canadian citizens and non-permanent residents. It also closed all but four airports to international travel; flights from US and Mexico remain unaffected. For now, the restrictions do not apply to international trade or business – presumably supply chains will remain operational and the movement of cargo will continue.

The airline industry has proven resilient to economic and health shocks, including pandemics, in the past. However, workers have experienced tremendous hardship and a suppression of wages or working conditions in the recovery process.

In this pandemic, air transportation workers are on the front lines of protecting the broader public from the spread of

### WHAT THE UNION EXPECTS FROM EMPLOYERS

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Appropriate protective gear

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Proper safety training

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Strict personal hygiene protocol

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Ensure sick leave is paid

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Social distancing measures

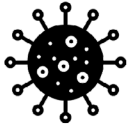
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Full income assistance

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Consideration for EI programs in event of hours reduction

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the virus and are at heightened risk of coming into contact with the virus. They are also vulnerable to experiencing declining hours or even layoffs as travel restrictions continue. There is the risk of a hangover effect while consumers mull the return to international travel once restrictions have been lifted. For example, it was approximately 7 months until air transportation recovered previous levels in the Asia Pacific after the SARS outbreak in 2003.

## HOW LOCAL UNIONS IN AIR TRANSPORTATION CAN SUPPORT MEMBERS

Local Unions must ensure employers are providing proper training on a regular basis so that staff have the best available knowledge for personal safety and are limiting the possibility of infection even as workers continue to interact with the public. This includes access to protective gear.

Local unions should ensure employers communicate clear protocols to workers during this time around personal hygiene, workplace hygiene and social distancing with co-workers and customers. Protocols must be updated regularly as information is constantly shifting.

Local unions must ensure any required sick leave is paid and income supports are available in the event layoffs occur. The federal government has implemented temporary special measures in its Work-Sharing program for workplaces affected by COVID-19. In the event of work slow-down, local unions should investigate whether or not the Work-Sharing program would be a good fit for your workplace. Other mitigating measures such as scheduling alternate shifts, using vacation, and accessing banked days.

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.

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