

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

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## ABOUT CANADA'S HOSPITALITY SECTOR

In 2017, Canada's accommodations services industry generated revenues of almost \$21.5 billion. In that same year, salaries, wages, commissions and benefits totaled approximately \$6 billion. In 2018, Canada's accommodations services industry had a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$12.4 billion, meaning it contributed 0.6% of Canada's overall GDP in that year.

Unifor represents more than 8,000 hospitality workers employed at almost 100 hotels, motels, and resorts across Canada, including at 10 Fairmont properties.

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

Canada's hospitality sector is extremely vulnerable to external risks such as pandemics, such as COVID-19. As the economy suffers and household incomes decline or are put in jeopardy, discretionary spending on recreational activities like tourism and hospitality is immediately curtailed. Business travel will also decrease dramatically as the economy contracts and corporations seek to reduce spending and protect the safety of their employees. The hospitality sector suffered huge but temporary downturns following 9/11, the SARS crisis (especially in Toronto), and the 2008 global economic crisis.

Workers in the hospitality sector are vulnerable in a number of ways. Most of them come in direct contact with the travelling public, a huge health and safety risk during a pandemic situation. Financially speaking, hospitality workers are often the first group to face mass layoffs in times of crisis. Many hospitality workers may not qualify for employment insurance (EI), and their benefits coverage may be contingent on a minimum

### WHAT THE UNION EXPECTS FROM HOSPITALITY EMPLOYERS

What the union expects from our employers

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

Waiving of minimum sick bank hours to qualify for benefits coverage

number of hours worked in a given period. In addition, some workers earn gratuities as a part of their income, and EI coverage may not compensate them fairly or adequately for this lost income.

During a pandemic, hospitality workers face a unique risk from the use of hotels as formal and informal quarantine spaces. In these circumstances, hospitality workers are severely under-resourced in terms of safety gear, procedures, and training compared to frontline healthcare workers in a formal medical setting, and they may face pressure from the employer to carry on with business as usual.

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

Local unions must ensure members have access to adequate and appropriate health and safety gear, procedures, and policies from their employers, using a risk-based approach. This is especially important for those in close contact with customers and public spaces. Employers must provide proper training, on a regular basis, so staff have the best available knowledge for personal safety in what is a rapidly-changing and fluid situation.

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

Local unions must ensure employers and governments do not require hospitality 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.

While we are increasingly seeing the full closure of many gaming outlets on a province-by-province basis, hotels, motels and resorts are largely still open and operational, though on a restricted basis. However, widespread layoffs are occurring in hospitality properties across the country. Local unions can urge government officials to enact wage replacement policies for impacted workers, including the expansion of eligibility for employment insurance benefits (including sick benefits). Some hospitality workers may not currently be eligible for EI, so lowering or eliminating qualification thresholds may be necessary. Hospitality workers should receive full income assistance, including support from employers, during this time of crisis. In addition, where relevant, employers must be required to extend full benefits coverage for the duration of the crisis, regardless of sick bank hours.

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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