

## Restarting the Economy: What mines, metals and minerals workers need to know

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While workers in mines, metals and minerals have seen relatively fewer COVID-19 cases than in some sectors, there have been notable instances of mining companies scaling back operations and suspending activities at remote sites to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks. Workers in the mines, metals and minerals sector face particular challenges due to the nature of their work, especially in remote locations where access to healthcare is limited.

As provincial economies reopen, laid off workers will begin to return to workplaces that have seen operations suspended or scaled back. Governments must use the reopening of the economy as an opportunity to ensure that mines and other worksites in the sector are safe and that workers are protected from COVID-19 through rigorous health and safety protocols.

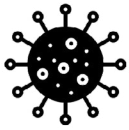
### ***What mines, metals and minerals workers can expect when returning to work***

While in most cases, mining and mineral exploration have been deemed essential services, some jurisdictions such as Quebec briefly suspended mining operations before allowing them to continue under new restrictions, while mining sites in other provinces have been shut down due to logistical challenges. As suspended operations restart activity over the next few months, workers who have been temporarily laid off may soon return to work. The challenges of the workplaces they will return to are considerable given that workers are often required to work in confined spaces in close proximity to one another. Such working conditions significantly increase the likelihood of a COVID-19 outbreak.

Mines, metals and minerals workers should expect rigorous screening procedures to be in place to identify potential COVID-19 cases before they cause an outbreak, as well as robust return-to-work protocols that outline specific measures which must be taken by every employee to reduce the chances of spreading infection.

### ***What mines, metals and minerals workers should expect from their employers***

Employers must prioritize the health of their employees by putting in place the necessary health and safety protocols to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks, while responding to workers' and union concerns about ongoing operational challenges and issues.



Unifor expects employers to:

- Develop and implement robust return-to-work protocols that are aimed at mitigating COVID-19 hazards through workplace-specific practices and procedures, e.g. workplace screening, social-distancing guidelines, personal protective equipment (PPE) use, sanitization, etc.
- Provide workers with access to appropriate PPE, where needed.
- Provide the necessary training and information to workers so that they can follow the return-to-work protocols and health and safety guidelines.
- Appoint a health and safety supervisor who is tasked with ensuring that return-to-work protocols as well as public health directives and guidelines are being followed.

### ***What mines, metals and minerals workers need from government***

Governments across the country must ensure that measures are in place to limit the possibility of outbreaks within mines, metals and minerals workplaces.

Governments must:

- Develop sector-specific public health directives and health and safety guidelines that are designed to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks.
- Enforce public health directives and health and safety guidelines through proactive inspections of mines, metals and minerals worksites.
- Penalize employers who violate public health directives and orders.
- Implement a rapid response complaint system that allows workers and their union representatives to report unsafe employer practices.
- Ensure that workers returning to their workplaces have adequate access to COVID-19 testing and that workers placed in quarantine are able to access a minimum of 14 days of paid sick leave.

### ***Additional Resources***

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. For more information on return-to-work health and safety guidelines and practices, please visit the following links:

- Workplace Safety North: Guidance on mining during COVID-19 <https://www.workplacesafetynorth.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/Mining-Guidance-during-COVID-19-Workplace-Safety-North-2020-06-01.pdf>
- B.C. Guidance for COVID-19: Mineral Exploration & Mining <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/mineral-exploration-mining/health-safety/covid-19#guidance-mining-smelting>
- Quebec guide to health standards in the workplace (in French): <https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/Publications/100/Documents/DC100-2146web.pdf>