

Restarting the Economy: What warehousing and logistics workers need to know

Revised June 17, 2020

Warehousing and logistics play a critical role in the supply chain, ensuring essential goods and supplies make it to businesses, front-line organizations and into people's homes. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant challenges in ensuring there are little to no disruptions; however, as we have seen, this is not always the case. Even the smallest of interruptions can cause bottlenecks to form throughout the chain. Warehouses have seen outbreaks of the virus amongst workers who often work very closely together. These workers, along with truck drivers and couriers, have also seen an intensification of their workloads as employers place increased pressure to make sure shipments and deliveries are being expedited.

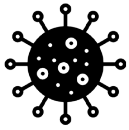
In order to ensure the integrity and resiliency of our supply chains, we need to ensure that workers are properly protected at all times, especially warehouse workers and delivery workers. Without protective measures in place, this can result in severe implications.

What warehousing and logistics workers can expect when returning to work

Many warehousing, storage, cross-dock operations, distribution and transportation operations have been deemed essential services by governments and as such, have continued to work since the onset of the pandemic. However, significant supply chain disruptions may have resulted in some companies in this sector to either reduce their workforce or alter their operations. Further, with a number of larger retailers actively looking to close down brick and mortar locations and focus on e-commerce, this will have implications as work duties are restructured with more warehouses transforming into fulfilment centres.

Maintaining worker safety and keeping up with demand has been some of the key challenges faced, since many warehouses were not designed with physical distancing in mind. Further, with increased demand for online orders and deliveries, truck drivers and couriers have been feeling increased workload pressures. Again, the shift towards direct home delivery will result in drivers needing to develop and implement measures to protect themselves from greater one-to-one interactions.

Unifor will continue to monitor these industry trends and rapidly evolving changes in our workplaces and ensure that our work processes and collective agreements continue to make worker safety and healthy working conditions a priority.



What warehousing and logistics workers should expect from their employers

Clear and open channels of communication between workers and employers is necessary to ensure health and safety of workers, especially those who work on the road, and to avoid major workplace virus outbreaks.

Unifor expects employers to:

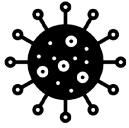
- Develop, communicate, train, monitor and evaluate return to work and health and safety procedures in collaboration with unions and workers. This must include proper training and instructions in areas such as worker screening and COVID-19 symptom detection procedures prior to entering a facility, physical distancing and information on what to expect inside warehouse facilities.
- Employers must ensure warehouse workers and drivers have access to appropriate personal protective equipment, access to sanitation stations and frequent cleaning and sanitizing of common work areas and surfaces, including break rooms and restrooms, as well as truck cab interiors.
- Proper workplace training and orientation for new workers where there is mass hiring to keep up with demand.
- Directives for physical distancing should be put into place on the work floor and break/lunch shifts rotated so that large groups of people are not sharing break spaces and lunchrooms at the same time. For couriers, delivery protocols, including contactless methods and payment/scanning protocols, should be established to limit one-on-one contact with customers.
- Facilities with customer counters must ensure that public spaces are monitored and proper protocols put into place for everyone's safety.
- Employers that have instituted pandemic pay increases and bonuses must make these initiatives permanent.

What warehousing and logistics workers need from government

All levels of government have a strong role to play in ensuring the health and safety of warehouse and logistics workers in order to maintain the integrity and resiliency of our supply chains that millions of Canadians rely on.

As such, Unifor proposes the following:

- The federal government must continue working with U.S. to ensure minimal delays at border crossings so that workers and products can flow in and out promptly while also maintaining public safety.
- Ensure that long-haul truck drivers have access to operational rest stops, including bathrooms and food service, especially in more remote areas.



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- Strong and proactive enforcement of employment standards to ensure employers are not forcing drivers to work long hours on the road and that proper rest breaks are taken. Safety regulations and worker safety should not be relaxed for the sake of shipping expediency.
- Ensure all workers have access to paid sick days and that government income security programs are flexible and responsive to meet needs of workers in fast-changing industries.

Additional Resources

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.

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