

Ministry of Health

# Guidance for Employers Managing Workers with Symptoms within 48 Hours of COVID-19 Immunization

Version 2.0, September 8, 2021

This guidance provides basic information only. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, or legal advice.

In the event of any conflict between this guidance document and any applicable emergency orders, or directives issued by the Minister of Health, Minister of Long-Term Care, or the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), the order or directive prevails.

- Please check the Ministry of Health (MOH) [COVID-19 website](#) regularly for updates to this document, list of symptoms, other guidance documents, Directives and other information.

This guidance may be modified as directed by the local public health unit (PHU) based on local epidemiology.

## Purpose

- The purpose of this document is to:
  - Support employers, including health care settings and long-term care homes, on planning for and supporting workers who have recently received a COVID-19 vaccine; and
  - Provide guidance related to COVID-19 workplace screening for workers experiencing post-vaccine symptoms. This guidance does **not** apply to screening outside of workplaces.
- This guidance document pertains only to workers who:
  - Are required to be at work in-person; AND
  - Have received a COVID-19 vaccine within 48 hours prior to being at work (including day of vaccination, which is considered day 1); AND

- Do not have a known exposure to a confirmed COVID-19 case in the last 10 days.
- Workers who have received a COVID-19 vaccine in the past 48 hours and are experiencing symptoms, and/or also have a known exposure to someone with confirmed COVID-19 in the last 10 days should not attend work in-person, and should self-isolate and be tested for COVID-19.
- Workers who are advised to self-isolate due to an exposure to a COVID-19 case or for any other reason, should also not attend work in-person.

## Guidance for Employers

- During active screening, workers should indicate whether they have any symptoms which would exclude them from the workplace. This should be documented and reported to their manager and/or Occupational Health department prior to coming to or entering the workplace. If the individual is unsure, based on their symptoms, whether they should come to work, they should consult their Occupational Health department (if available) or a healthcare professional or call Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000).
- Workers who experience side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine are entitled to an infectious disease emergency leave (IDEL) under the [Employment Standards Act](#) (ESA).
- Workers are also entitled to IDEL if they are under a direction given by their employer to stay away from work because of the employer's concern that the worker may expose others in the workplace to COVID-19, or if they are not performing their duties because of information or directions related to COVID-19 issued by a public health official, Telehealth Ontario, the government of Ontario, a qualified health practitioner, or certain other bodies.
- Employers should consider reviewing staffing schedules and assignments to ensure adequate staffing in the event that workers may be off due to side effects after they receive their vaccine. Where operationally feasible, consider asking workers to schedule their vaccine appointment at a time when there will be at least 48 hours until their next work shift.

- Before they get their COVID-19 vaccine, inform workers about the potential of experiencing side effects after they receive their vaccine and [provide information](#) to them about what they can do to manage any possible side effects.
- For workplaces conducting surveillance testing (e.g., long-term care homes):
  - Where operationally feasible, consider scheduling routine COVID-19 surveillance testing within two days prior to vaccine receipt.

## Symptom Screening of Health Care and Other Workers in the 48 Hours following Immunization

- Similar to other vaccines, the [COVID-19 vaccine can cause side effects](#) although not everyone will experience them. Most side effects are mild to moderate in severity and may occur in the first day or two after receiving the vaccine. Side effects often get better on their own within several days of immunization.
- Common side effects include: pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, as well as tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, and fever.
- It is possible that individuals may contract COVID-19 before or around the time of immunization and not be aware. Symptoms of COVID-19 may be similar to the side effects after receiving the vaccine. If a recently immunized worker has any concerns that they may be infected with COVID-19, they should not go to work and should get tested.
- Workers should be actively screened for symptoms and exposures as per regulatory requirements prior to arriving at their health care setting/place of work.
- If the worker responds 'yes' to any of the following symptoms when being screened before entering the workplace (e.g., [Ontario workplace screening tool](#), [Ontario school and childcare screening tool](#), [Ontario Screening Tool for Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes](#)), they must not enter the workplace or be permitted entry into a facility, regardless of whether they have been immunized within the past 48 hours. These individuals should self-isolate and seek further medical attention.
  - Fever and/or chills

- Cough or barking cough (new or worsening)
- Shortness of breath
- Decrease or loss of smell or taste
- For children: (<18 years old): nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea

## Workers with Certain Mild Symptoms

- In the **48 hours from the time they received their immunization**, if the worker responds 'yes' to any the following symptoms (and no others), **and where the symptoms are mild** (e.g., they feel well enough to work) **and the symptom(s) only began after immunization**, the individual can enter the facility/workplace:
  - Headache
  - Fatigue
  - Muscle ache/Joint Pain
- Workers with these symptoms that are allowed to work must be advised to wear a mask for source control (i.e., a surgical/procedure mask is required) for the entire duration of their shift at work. Masks may only be removed to consume food or drink but the individual must remain at least two metres away from others when their mask is removed. These individuals should physically distance from others if possible.
- If COVID-19 is suspected at any point for any reason, workers should not attend work in-person, and should self-isolate, and seek further medical evaluation.
- Note: Pain, redness and swelling at the site of vaccine injection are not symptoms compatible with COVID-19. These reactions do not require the worker to self-isolate and/or stay home from work.

## Additional Monitoring Following Immunization

- Workers should continue to monitor their symptoms and they should not come to work nor be permitted entry into a facility/workplace, and if already at work, they should leave work immediately and seek further medical evaluation in the following scenarios:
  - Symptoms begin to interfere with their ability to carry out usual activities; OR
  - Symptoms that are worsening or not improving; OR
  - Symptoms develop beyond the 3 symptoms listed above; OR;
  - Symptoms that last > 48 hours after they were immunized

- Unless confirmed to be symptoms related to COVID-19 disease, any potential adverse event following immunization (AEFI) to the COVID-19 vaccine should be reported (either by the worker or through their health care provider) to the local [public health unit](#) using the [Adverse Event Following Immunization \(AEFI\) reporting form](#) (see form for list of events).