PSYCHOLOGICAL HAZARDS: RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This resource provides information on the psychological hazards associated with returning to the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. For some employers and workers, the prospect of returning to work could be a source of stress and anxiety during this transition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged everyone's resilience. The mental health effects of this challenge will vary among workers. Be proactive in creating a supportive and respectful environment to help workers cope and adjust to the 'new normal'.

Mental resilience

There are many stressors associated with returning to the workplace during a pandemic. Fear of infection, adapting to new procedures, changes in physical health, financial loss or insecurity, and re-establishing relationships with coworkers, are a few of the stressors that can affect psychological health and well-being.

Communicating about and demonstrating a commitment to workers' physical and psychological health and safety is an important consideration for employers to help destigmatize mental health issues.

- Talk about how processes or work environments have changed and what needs to be done to ensure health and safety.
- Take stock of the mental health supports you have in place. Consider training, policies, flexible work arrangements, vacation and other benefits such as family assistance programs.
- Managers and supervisors should be aware of the supports available and trained to identify signs of mental health challenges.
- Share and use available resources, such as those listed on the following page.

Healthy coping strategies for individuals include:

- being physically active
- physical – but not social – distancing
- establishing and maintaining a routine
- getting enough sleep
- making healthy food choices
- taking breaks from work tasks
- avoiding the use of alcohol or drugs to deal with stress, isolation or boredom.

Physical safety

Confidence in the measures to protect physical safety results in lower rates of psychological distress and mental health issues. As an employer during the COVID-19 pandemic, you must meet public health requirements to protect physical safety. Consistently enforcing all reasonable and practical workplace health and safety controls to protect workers will demonstrate your commitment to your workers' well-being – and is good business sense.

Best practices

Best practices can be an important part of controlling psychological hazards in the workplace. Consider using the strategy examples provided in this bulletin to help workers stay safe and healthy.

Note that best practices continuously evolve and improve – make sure that you have current advice from expert sources in choosing what practices you follow.

Stay informed

Staying informed on COVID-19 is essential to protecting physical health and gives workers a sense of control. However, constant exposure to and reminders of the potential threat can cause a stress response. To protect mental health:

- limit consumption of COVID-19 related news
- choose credible sources for COVID-19 information such as those listed on the next page.

alberta.ca/covid19

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Need help now?

Alberta Health Services Help in Tough Times

- Mental Health Help Line at 1-877-303-2642
- Addiction Help Line at 1-866-332-2322

Contact us

OHS Contact Centre
Report serious incidents, make immediate danger complaints, ask OHS questions

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton & surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

File a complaint online
ohscomplaintsportal.labour.alberta.ca

Online incident reporting
Potentially serious, mine or mine site incidents
oir.labour.alberta.ca

OHS website
alberta.ca/OHS

Alberta Health Services
COVID-19 public health order violations

ephisahs.albertahealthservices.ca/create-case

For more information

Assessment and control of psychological hazards in the workplace
ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp024

Hazard assessment and control
ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

Worker deconditioning following an absence from the workplace
ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/covid19-15

OHS COVID-19 resources
ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/covid-19

Go to alberta.ca/covid19 for the most up-to-date information on restrictions that pertain to COVID-19

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alberta.ca/covid19

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