

Domestic violence and the workplace during the pandemic

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There has been a global increase in reports of domestic violence during this COVID-19 pandemic. Issues of isolation, economic insecurity, stress and disconnect from social supports are all risk factors that increase the chance of violence.

With many of our members working from home, we are sharing this resource sheet to address some of the issues and assistance available during this pandemic.

DUTY OF EMPLOYERS

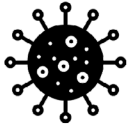
In Canada, occupational health and safety legislation applies to remote workplaces in the same way it applies to an employer's traditional workplace. Employers still have health and safety obligations to employees even when they are working from their own homes. Employers are expected to take steps to ensure employees are safe in their home workspace in the same way they would in their regular workplace.

Domestic violence is identified as a workplace hazard in Ontario, New Brunswick and Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation. In other provinces and federally, it is covered under the employer's duty to prevent and address workplace violence.

Employer workplace violence and harassment policies extend to cover working from home. The policy and program should include instructions for how employees can confidentially report domestic violence, how employers will respond to incidents, domestic violence resources that can be accessed and a workplace safety plan.

Virtual group meetings and individual meetings are a good way to establish welfare checks with employees who are working remotely. It may be advisable for employers to establish a higher-than-average frequency of these checks if the employer is aware or suspects the employee is in a vulnerable situation at home.

Some Canadian provinces have put together guides for employers dealing with domestic violence and the workplace. For example, [WorkSafeBC](#) and [federally](#).



The Domestic Violence at Work Network has produced briefs for COVID-19 responses including [examples for employers](#).

Unifor leadership can seek further guidance from their Health and Safety Committee or Women's Advocate if they have one.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEAVE

All provinces allow eligible employees to take job-protected leave for reasons related to domestic violence. This is a paid leave in all provinces and federally with the exception of British Columbia. BC has introduced legislation to include paid leave. This has been stalled during the pandemic.

The legislative leaves are minimums and many locals have negotiated improvements on the law.

SUPPORTING MEMBERS FACING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Women's Advocates continue to do outreach and work to support our members. More information on their activities can be found [here](#). If you do not have a Women's Advocate, you can refer to the resources and suggested approaches in the Isolation section of [Unifor's Mental Health Resource Guide](#).

The Domestic Violence at Work Network has assembled a lot of useful information [here](#).

Shelters and support services for gender-based violence continue to operate. Many of them have altered their protocols to address physical distancing requirements. You can find information by connecting to your local shelter at www.sheltersafe.ca

In April, the federal government announced a \$40-million commitment to Women and Gender Equality Canada to support the work of women's shelters and sexual assault centres across Canada. Many are still in dire need of support and everyone who is able is encouraged to donate.

YOUR SUPPORT IS INVALUABLE

Key components of domestic violence are shame and isolation. By naming domestic violence openly in health and safety workplace policies, you are working to destigmatize domestic violence. By showing you care, you are breaking down the isolation. Your support and work in this area is invaluable.

Remember to keep checking on resources posted regularly at www.unifor.org/covid19 and www.unifor.org/covid19mentalhealth.