

The “New Normal”: What Ontario’s Plan to Reopen Means for Employers

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On April 27, 2020, the Ontario provincial government released “A Framework for Reopening our Province”, which details the government’s plan to gradually ease the restrictions that were imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19. For employers that were required to suspend or alter operations, lay off staff, and cut salaries, the promise of a return to normal in the near future – however gradual – is certainly appealing. Here is what employers need to know about the Ford government’s plan to reopen Ontario.

The plan is organized into three phases:

1. Phase 1, in which we currently find ourselves, involves the closure of non-essential businesses and public/recreation areas, as well as restrictions on essential workers such as long-term care home workers.
2. Phase 2 involves the gradual easing of restrictions over three stages, each of which is to last between two and four weeks.
3. Phase 3 will see the government partner with businesses to pursue economic recovery, with an emphasis on job creation.

Of most interest to employers currently navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, Phase 2 will involve the reopening of workplaces throughout the three stages. Throughout each stage, the Chief Medical Officer of Health will be monitoring the spread of the virus in Ontario, as well as the treatment and tracking capacities of our health system, and will use these factors to determine whether Ontario will progress to the next stage. The government’s plan suggests that Stage 1 will see the “modified” reopening (meaning delivery or curb-side pickup) of “select workplaces”, Stage 2 will see the reopening of “some service industries and additional office and retail workplaces”, and Stage 3 will involve the “opening of all workplaces responsibly”.

The provincial government has confirmed that its top concern is worker health and safety. Employers will be required to have a plan that promotes and adheres to strict hygiene and sanitation standards, and employees must practice physical distancing to the extent possible. The provincial government will be releasing guidelines, documents and learning tools to provide guidance to employers as they restart their business, and to complement the guidelines that have been provided to essential workplaces. The provincial government has also added more resources for worker protection, including increasing the number of workplace inspectors and specialists, and doubling the capacity of Ontario’s Health and Safety Call Centre.

[WeirFoulds’ employment law group](#) is monitoring these developments and will be providing updates as the COVID-19 situation progresses. For more information on how to respond to COVID-19 in your workplace or organization, please contact one of our authors.

The information and comments herein are for the general information of the reader and are not intended as advice or opinion to be relied upon in relation to any particular circumstances. For particular application of the law to specific

situations, the reader should seek professional advice.

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