

Stay Home and Stay Safe: Ontario Announces Paid Sick Leave to Combat COVID-19 Pandemic

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By Daniel Wong, and Max Skrow

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has placed the Ontario government in the unenviable position of having to balance the need to protect workers with the need to preserve and protect Ontario businesses amidst this unprecedented social and economic disruption. To that end, the Ontario government has imposed strict lockdown measures,^[1] introduced programs such as Infectious Disease Emergency Leave,^[2] and has ramped up workplace health and safety inspections across the province.^[3]

On April 29, 2021, the Ontario government will introduce the *COVID-19 Putting Workers First Act*, which if passed, would require Ontario employers to provide their workers with paid sick leave of up to \$200 per day for up to three days (which need not be taken consecutively), without the need for a sick note. Employers will then be able to apply to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board for reimbursement of up to \$200 for each day of paid leave taken by employees. This program, which has been named the Ontario COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit Program, is intended to provide workers with paid leave because of certain reasons related to COVID-19, including going for a COVID-19 test, self-isolation due to COVID-19 at the direction of the employer, medical practitioner or other authority, receiving a vaccination, experiencing a side effect from a COVID-19 vaccination, and taking care of a dependent who is sick with or has symptoms of COVID-19 or is self-isolating due to COVID-19.

If the *COVID-19 Putting Workers First Act* is passed as presently proposed, the Ontario COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit Program will be retroactive to April 19, 2021 and is slated to expire on September 25, 2021. This program applies to Ontario employees, but not to independent contractors.

WeirFoulds will be monitoring this program and the proposed legislation enacting it. Stay tuned for updates.

[1] <https://www.weirfoulds.com/ontario-declares-emergency-and-issues-stay-at-home-order-what-are-the-implications-for-employers>

[2] <https://www.weirfoulds.com/a-cautious-reopening-ontario-extends-the-deemed-covid-19-emergency-leave-to-january-2021>

[3] <https://www.weirfoulds.com/employers-are-you-ready-ontario-continues-to-ramp-up-workplace-inspection-efforts>

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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