

## COVID-19 FAQ #25 Responding to COVID-19

In FAQ #25, you will find information on: the voluntary COVID-19 vaccine; COVID-19; union support; health equity; and intimate partner and gender-based violence.

**Need a refresher on ETFO's last COVID-19 update?**

[View a version of COVID-19 FAQ #24.](#)

Stay informed about your health and safety at work at [etfohealthandsafety.ca](https://etfohealthandsafety.ca).

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Are education workers included in phase two of the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out in Ontario?**

On March 5, 2021, it was confirmed that education workers will be included in phase two of Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan. They are included in the "essential workers unable to work from home" category. The COVID-19 vaccine remains voluntary.

**When will education workers be able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine?**

ETFO has continuously advocated, at both the local and provincial levels, for voluntary vaccinations to be made available to education workers as soon as possible. With the acceleration of the delivery of vaccines, the Ministry confirmed, to ETFO and other education affiliates last week, that the roll-out is expected to move more quickly now.

The prioritization of education workers in phase two has not been confirmed. The government is considering priority amongst those workers who are in schools (e.g., special education workers being given first priority), as well as priority between those working in schools and those working virtually. No decision has been made on this at this time.

As the vaccine roll-out is being managed by Public Health Units (PHUs), the timing and sign-up process may differ from region to region. Education workers will be vaccinated alongside other essential workers who are unable to work from home, after some vulnerable populations, in [phase two of the vaccine distribution plan](#). Phase two is scheduled to take place between April and July 2021.

**There is so much information in the news and on the internet about COVID-19, making it hard to tell what to believe. What sources can I trust?**

We have all learned about COVID-19 in real time, as the pandemic has progressed. Not only are there many sources of information, but information has changed as we have learned more. While social media may provide a lot of information quickly, what you learn there should be confirmed.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) has three levels of government working with employers and labour. It is a trusted source of information to help you stay safe at work. Check out the CCOHS [resource](#) they have created to help separate fact from fiction, along with links to help you evaluate what you have heard. ETFO also compiles reliable information on its [health and safety site](#).

**What is ETFO doing to help keep us safe at work?**

ETFO has not backed down about the need for safer schools and continues to advocate for better safety measures, like smaller class sizes, improvements to ventilation, and paid sick leave for all workers. For example, the ETFO General Secretary (GS), along with other Affiliate GSs, attend regularly scheduled meetings with the Deputy Minister and Ministry staff to raise concerns and seek solutions. ETFO staff also participate in provincial working groups to make sure decision-makers hear your concerns, and ETFO actively engages with government, school boards, MPPs and PHUs to ensure they understand what needs to happen to make schools safer during the pandemic.

The frustration that more hasn't been done to make schools as safe as they could be is understandable. In Ontario, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* gives power to individual workers, and we have found that Ministry of Labour (MOL) investigators and PHUs are often unwilling to discuss concerns with the union at both the local and provincial level.

The most powerful tool to address health and safety concerns is individual members asserting their rights. When reports have been made to the MOL and investigators have come to schools and work sites, it has often resulted in orders (i.e., directives to employers) that can be used to improve safety everywhere. Work refusals have resulted in the immediate resolution of some concerns and have added to the growing calls for safer schools.

To help members understand their rights, ETFO has worked with the Ontario Federation of Labour and other education unions to create [A COVID-19 Health and Safety Rights Guide for Education Workers](#). Contact your local ETFO office or a health and safety representative for support if you are making a report to the MOL or engaging in a work refusal.

## What is health equity?

Health equity involves the connection between social conditions, health and access to health care. The unequal impact of the pandemic on populations across Ontario has reaffirmed the significance of health equity. For example:

- A [2020 survey](#) of people with “long-term conditions or disabilities indicated that 61 per cent of participants reported a major or moderate impact from COVID-19 on at least one of the types of financial obligations or essential needs.”
- [Recent statistics](#) about job loss for “low-income earning women remains at 13.8 per cent (–557,000 jobs), below their pre-pandemic level compared to 11.5 per cent (–339,250 jobs) for men.”
- [Public health data](#) consistently shows that “neighbourhoods in Ontario experiencing the highest levels of material deprivation experienced disproportionately higher rates of COVID-19 and related hospitalizations and deaths.”

In October 2020, the Federal government published [From Risk to Resilience: An Equity Approach to COVID-19](#). The report provides the health equity approach to COVID-19 as a response to how the pandemic compounded existing social inequities. The approach identifies four “high impact areas of action: economic security and employment conditions; stable housing and healthy built environment; health, education and social service systems; and environmental sustainability.

As Ontario continues its reopening plans, the urgency of adopting a health equity approach includes everything from [paid sick days](#) to [climate justice](#). For more information about health equity, visit the [Wellesley Institute](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#).

## What are some of the causes that have increased intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender-based violence (GBV) during the pandemic?

There has been an increase in frequency and severity of violence since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the reasons for the increase are the closure of public spaces, and other health and safety restrictions that have created lack of access to face-to-face counselling and the inability to flee to shelters.

In a sector that was underfunded pre-pandemic the needs of survivors have increased while, unfortunately, reporting has decreased. The pandemic has caused further barriers to be able to leave an abusive partner.

During the pandemic, unemployment among women has increased, which means that survivors of IPV and GBV have become more economically dependent on their partners. Survivors are also greatly challenged to access support if they lack internet access and privacy to make a phone call, or send a text message or email, which gives abusive partners further control.

March 16, 2021

The [first national survey](#) on this topic, by Ending Violence Association of Canada, surveyed staff and volunteers working in transition houses, shelters, immigration centres, and other social agencies across the country. [As reported by the CBC](#), the survey found that 82 per cent of those surveyed determined that violence increased and became more frequent, with one fifth saying abusers' violent tactics changed and control over their victims increased. There is also increased concern that a 'return to normal' is impossible due to the harm caused. In order to help families recover, there will be an increased need for services that support women, children, non-binary, and trans individuals.

You can learn more about IPV and GBV, including where to seek support, on the [Government of Canada website](#).

**For other information, please check [ETFO's dedicated COVID-19 webpage](#).**