

Health and Safety Q&A

Prepared by Terri Szymanski, OPSEU Senior Health and Safety Officer – April 15, 2020.

- **Pregnancy**—we say considered immunocompromised because for some pregnancy is associated with respiratory issues and weakened immune systems especially in later stages. New (unpublished) work (below) says pregnant women can have different a symptom experience which may go undetected and may be more severe. There does not seem to be vertical transmission and there does not seem to be virus in breastmilk. Our advice to locals remains to:
 - **Help our pregnant members evaluate their situation case-by-case**, considering the person’s work and given the person’s own personal medical situation with their doctor and other options that may be avail if needed. Even when in a pandemic I would argue that the rights to accommodation where possible and needed should be considered on case by case. The OHRC is still engaged, whether there’s a pandemic or not. Employers cannot suspend employees’ rights to accommodation (whether or not they’re pregnant) due to a pandemic.
 - **Help our pregnant members work remotely if possible**. OPSEU’s position on this is that employees should be allowed to work from home and – if that’s not possible – then stay home and be paid. Then, if that doesn’t work, they should be allowed access to paid sick leave (or, if they don’t have access to paid sick leave in their Collective Agreement, then EI Sick Leave or Declared Emergency Leave, as last resorts).
 - **Help others understand the stress that goes along with this—use the JHSC check-ins to raise and recognize this issue**.
 - **Help them have maximum precautions and measures and procedures in writing** (social distance and space, procedures to reduce exposures, PPE, etc). The Regulation for Healthcare and Residential Facilities Section 9 (1) says that the employer shall reduce the measures and procedures for the health and safety of workers to writing and measures may deal with ...
 - 7. The hazards of biological, chemical, and physical agents present in the workplace, including the hazards of dispensing or administering such agents
 - 8. Measures to protect workers from exposure to biological, chemical, or physical agent that is or may be a hazard to the reproductive capacity of a worker, the pregnancy of a worker, or the nursing of a child of a worker.
 - **Help them obtain accommodation where needed and possible**. So I can see why a doctor note simply citing COVID may not be sufficient. If the person has additional restrictions because of personal medical conditions affecting the respiratory or immune system then I don’t think any employer can be arbitrary at all when looking at accommodation and what might be avail. Take into consideration reduced lung capacity etc. as pregnancy progresses.

Arabi et al (Apr 7 2020) “Clinical characteristics of COVID-19 infection in pregnant women - a systematic review and meta-analysis” <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.05.20053983v1>

Khan et al (Apr 3 2020) “COVID-19 infection during pregnancy - a systematic review to summarize possible symptoms, treatments, and pregnancy outcomes” <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.31.20049304v2>

Lackey et al (Apr 11 2020) "SARS-CoV-2 and human milk - what is the evidence" <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.07.20056812v1.full.pdf>

Yin et al (Apr 11 2020) "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) Infection During Pregnancy In China - A Retrospective Cohort Study" (can't find this one back on the internet so maybe it was retracted? – I have a copy that I downloaded earlier)