

November 3, 2022

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**Medical Officer of Health Advocates for Paid Sick Days to Help Break the ‘Chain of Transmission’  
to Prevent COVID-19 in the Workplace**

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**TO:** All Employers and Persons Responsible for businesses and organizations located in the City of Peterborough and County of Peterborough and in Hiawatha First Nation and Curve Lake First Nation

**RE:** Paid Sick Days for All Staff

Valued employer,

The threat of COVID-19 continues to be significant for our community. [Peterborough Public Health’s Local COVID-19 Risk Index](#) continues to fluctuate between “high” and “very high”; a trend that will likely continue in the weeks and months ahead. One reason we are so worried about COVID-19 transmission this year, is that last year we were dealing with the Delta Variant of Concern (VOC), whereas this year Omicron is the leading strain. Unfortunately, we know that Omicron is even more transmissible than previous VOCs.<sup>1</sup>

We’ve learned a great deal about COVID-19 since the pandemic began, most notably, is that [COVID-19 is an airborne virus](#), and [does not spread as easily as we once thought by touching contaminated surfaces](#). The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety states that “the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads from a person that is infected through the air, [by respiratory droplets and aerosols](#).” Additionally, the [Ontario Science Table noted](#) that “aerosols play a role in the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, especially in poorly ventilated indoor areas.”<sup>2</sup>

The former *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act*, once outlined mandatory public health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces. Today however, without provincial COVID-19 regulations in place, it is the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) that is the prevailing legislation to ensure that staff are safe at their workplace. With regards to COVID-19, the [OHSA states](#) “under Ontario’s labour laws, employers must take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of workers. This includes protecting workers from hazards posed by infectious diseases.”<sup>3</sup>

Protecting your workforce by breaking [the chain of transmission](#) is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to keep your employees safe and healthy, maintain business continuity, and protect the community as a whole from COVID-19. Put simply - [we want people to stay home when they are sick](#).

Moreover, the research is clear – providing *paid sick days* for employees reduces the transmission of COVID-19 as noted in Ontario Science Table research that stated “enabling employers to provide paid sick leave to employees during the pandemic ensures workplace safety, and protection of the public.”<sup>4</sup> University of Toronto research also identified that “there is evidence that paid sick leave protects workers from infectious risk exposures in workplaces.”<sup>5</sup>

Providing paid sick days to employees may seem counterintuitive from an economic or fiscal perspective, however, the research is clear, and in addition to protecting our already overburdened healthcare system, offering paid sick days to your workforce can actually be an economic driver for your business, that supports growth, and prosperity.<sup>6,7,8</sup> The health and economic benefits about paid sick day programs is described in detail [here](#).

The Ontario government has extended its '[paid infectious disease emergency leave](#)' benefit until March 31, 2023, and we are encouraging all employers to make use of this program. It provides reimbursement to the employer for up to three days per employee, when an employee is off for [certain reasons related to COVID-19](#). The Peterborough Public Health Board of Health (PPH BOH) has advocated for the provision of adequate paid sick leave at a provincial level, providing comments on Bills 148, the Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs Act in 2017, and Bill 47, Making Ontario Open for Business Act, in 2018.

More recently, [in February of 2021](#), the PPH BOH passed a motion to endorse the principle of supporting paid sick day legislation within the context of an Infectious Disease health emergency, and to request that the province address the broader issue of paid sick days outside of health emergencies after the pandemic has been resolved. Likewise, in [September of this year](#), the PPH BOH also voted to support the Niagara Region Public Health advocacy for paid sick days across the province. While we continue to advocate provincially, this is something that you can do locally as an employer to protect the health of your workplace and save money.

Additionally, we are strongly encouraging all workplaces to offer additional paid sick days, beyond the three provincially subsidized days, as this is often not enough time for someone to recover from respiratory illnesses like influenza or COVID-19 and they may otherwise come to work ill.

Evidence shows that availability of paid sick days to your workforce is critical to the decision an employee will make when deciding to stay home, or employees may attend the workplace sick, potentially infecting others.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the importance of improving indoor air quality. Given that COVID-19 is an airborne virus, anything you can do to increase ventilation (either naturally by opening windows or doors, or mechanically by increasing HVAC turnover rates) will help reduce the transmission of COVID-19 indoors.<sup>9</sup> PPH has compiled many resources that will help with this, and they can be accessed [here](#).

As the 8<sup>th</sup> wave appears to be on our doorstep, we are imploring the business community to get 'back to the basics' to ensure that future waves aren't as severe or as frequent. Breaking the chain of transmission is one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and I can't overstate how important your actions are to not only just your setting, but to the community as a whole. The team at PPH remains committed to supporting your institution with any potential next steps and guidance you may require; please be in touch if we can be of service.

Sincerely,

*Thomas Piggott*

Dr. Thomas Piggott, MD MSc CCFP FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health and CEO



**1 person** attended work while feeling unwell because they had no paid sick days.

Protecting your workforce by breaking the chain of transmission is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to keep your employees safe and healthy, maintain business continuity, and protect the community as a whole from COVID-19. Put simply - we want people to stay home when they are sick.



**12 coworkers** test positive for COVID-19.



Evidence shows that availability of paid sick days to your workforce is critical to the decision an employee will make when deciding to stay home, or employees may attend the workplace sick, potentially infecting others.



**8 family members** in various households test positive for COVID-19.



**PRODUCTIVITY is IMPACTED when WORKERS come to WORK SICK!**

University of Toronto research identified that *"there is evidence that paid sick leave protects workers from infectious risk exposures in workplaces."*



**3 other workplaces** develop positive cases.

With regards to COVID-19, the Occupational Health and Safety Act states *"under Ontario's labour laws, employers must take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of workers. This includes protecting workers from hazards posed by infectious diseases."*

There are many health and economic benefits for offering paid sick days! Providing paid sick days to employees may seem counterintuitive from an economic or fiscal perspective, however, the research is clear: In addition to protecting our already overburdened healthcare system, offering paid sick days to your workforce can actually be an economic driver for your business, that supports growth, and prosperity .



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<sup>1</sup>Public Health Ontario. (2022). SARS-CoV-2 Omicron Variant BA.2 and Sub-lineages of BA.2: Evidence and Risk Assessment. Retrieved August 18, 2022 from [https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/nCoV/voc/covid-19-omicron-riskassessment.pdf?sc\\_lang=en](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/nCoV/voc/covid-19-omicron-riskassessment.pdf?sc_lang=en).

<sup>2</sup> Science M, Thampi N, Bitnun A, et al. (2022). Infection prevention and control considerations for schools during the 2022- 2023 academic year. Science Briefs of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table. Retrieved October 11, 2022 from [https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Infection-Prevention-and-Control-Considerations-for-Schools-During-the-2022-2023-Academic-Year\\_20220825\\_published.pdf](https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Infection-Prevention-and-Control-Considerations-for-Schools-During-the-2022-2023-Academic-Year_20220825_published.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development. Kings Printer. (2022). COVID-19 and the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Retrieved October 26, 2022 from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-occupational-health-safety-act>

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, Alison, Stall NM, Born KB, et al. Benefits of paid sick leave during the COVID-19 pandemic. Science Briefs of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table. 2021;2(25).

<sup>5</sup> Joint Centre for Bioethics, University of Toronto. (2021). Ethics of Paid Sick Leave for the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved August 18, 2022 from <https://jcb.utoronto.ca/ethics-of-paid-sick-leave-for-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

<sup>6</sup> National Partnership for Women & Families. (2020). Paid Sick Days Are Good for Business. Retrieved October 26, 2022 from, <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-good-for-business-and-workers.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Joint Economic Committee: United States Congress. (2015). The Economic Benefits of Paid Leave: Fact Sheet. Retrieved October 26, 2022 from, [https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/646d2340-dcd4-4614-ada9-be5b1c3f445c/jec-fact-sheet---economic-benefits-of-paid-leave.pdf](https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/646d2340-dcd4-4614-ada9-be5b1c3f445c/jec-fact-sheet---economic-benefits-of-paid-leave.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Asfaw, A., Rosa, R., & Pana-Cryan, R. (2017). Potential Economic Benefits of Paid Sick Leave in Reducing Absenteeism Related to the Spread of Influenza-Like Illness. *Journal of occupational and environmental medicine*, 59(9), 822–829. <https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000001076>. Retrieved October 26, 2022 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5649342/>

<sup>9</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. (2022). COVID-19: Guidance on indoor ventilation during the pandemic. Retrieved August 18, 2022 from, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/guideindoor-ventilation-covid-19-pandemic.html>.