

FAMILY TIPSHEET: How to safely return to work when you have a vulnerable family member

Holland Bloorview
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

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Based on when you are viewing this tip sheet, the information may not be the most up to date. Please refer to the date at the end of this document to determine when this tip sheet was last updated. You can also access this tip sheet online at hollandbloorview.ca/covid-19-tipsheets.

1. **Know your Employment Rights.** This is especially important if you have a vulnerable family member and may need to negotiate hours due to childcare and medical appointments.

Before you return to work or if you are thinking of returning to work, check out a legal resource such as [Steps to Justice](#) which provides practical and easy to understand information about legal problems in Ontario. The section “**Updates on the law and legal services related to COVID-19**” includes answers to your questions about employment during COVID-19 and when [you have a family member with a compromised immune system](#).

Other resources (free):

- [Ministry of Labour: COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) and workplace health and safety during COVID](#)
- [Ontario Human Rights Commission: COVID-19 and Ontario’s Human Rights Code – Questions and Answers](#)
- [Pro Bon Ontario Free Legal Advice Hotline](#)

2. **Seek answers around your job.** Going back to work after so many weeks of uncertainty can be stressful especially as you may have unanswered questions about job expectations. See the [Conference Board of Canada’s podcast Returning to the workplace](#) which outlines a framework for you to consider.

3. **Wear a mask at work** and get support from your workplace. If your co-workers in your immediate work environment all wear masks in solidarity, that means someone at home living with an [immunocompromised person would be safer](#).
4. **Disinfect more and share less.** You were already very careful about disinfecting when you were practicing social distancing during the pandemic and making limited trips to the grocery store. Now that you are going out more often, you may need to take extra precautions such as:
 - Wash your hands immediately before leaving work and then again when you come home.
 - Switch into a separate set of indoor clothes for wearing around the house when you get back home. If possible remove shoes and change out of clothes in an isolated space before entering other parts of the home. If you have a smaller living space, keep a robe by the door. As soon as you walk in, you can wash your hands, put the robe over your outdoor clothes and head to the bathroom to change.
 - Have a container at the door to put your phone, keys, wallet, lunch bag, purse, etc. As soon as you are able, you can wipe down those items before accessing them again at home as needed.
 - Change hand towels in bathrooms frequently or consider using paper towels.
 - Add another layer of cleaning inside the house or apartment. Frequently clean commonly used surfaces such as TV remotes, light switches, sinks, countertops, refrigerator handles, keyboards and doorknobs.
 - Consider not sharing items such as food, drinks, or silverware.
 - If you have a partner at home, who is acting as a primary caregiver and looking after your loved one, consider semi-isolating from that individual.
 - If your loved one uses a mobility device or a stroller, leave it outside the house or just inside the door when you return from a trip outside. Spinal Cord Injury Ontario has a [hand hygiene guideline](#) which offers reminders on what surfaces to clean on mobility devices.
5. **Weigh the risk and take small steps.** As things re-open in the Province you will be expanding your social circle and by default, so will your family. Anyone else outside the bubble will have to practice the 2 metre distance rule and wear a mask. *What additional safety guidelines do you need to consider?*
 - **Medical appointments:**
 - Schedule only essential visits and ask if appointments can be staggered to avoid extra trips to the same office.

- Ask for a time of day when it will be less crowded or for the first appointment of the day when you feel confident that cleaning has taken place.
 - Ask the facility what precautions they are taking to minimize risk during appointment (e.g., reducing the number of clients onsite, wiping down equipment between visits, etc.)
 - Ask for virtual appointments/ask for grouping of appointments from different clinics.
 - **Personal Support Workers:** Personal Support Workers are now equipped with masks and increased sanitation practices to protect their clients and themselves. It is recommended that caregivers contact their providers to understand their emergency preparedness, infectious disease control and other protocols of service. Other things to consider: what other clients/facilities the PSW visits, how they get there (public transit versus driving)
 - **Expanding your loved one's bubble.** If there is now a need or desire to go to a public space, ask yourself the following questions: "Will there be opportunity to practice physical distancing in the public space?," "Does my loved one have the ability to sanitize their hands and understand the no contact rule?," "Are they physically able to wear a mask as an extra layer of precaution?"
6. **Stay informed on the COVID-19 updates.** New guidelines emerge almost daily and it can be overwhelming. You might want to stay informed from a single reliable source in regard to changes, daily or as often as you feel that you are able to process the information.
- Consider subscribing to [CPAC \(Cable Public Affairs Channel\)](#) for live COVID-19 updates by the Government of Ontario and City of Toronto.
 - You can also connect by tweeting a question to [#MyCOVIDDisabilityQ](#), a Canadian Q&A hub to get answers to your disability questions specific to your child and youth with disabilities during the COVID-19 outbreak.
7. **Take time.** The return to "normalcy" will be a learning curve for everyone! Your child or loved one may also be worried or fearful about going out in public or that you are going "out there." If they perceive you as being "anxious/scared/worried," then that's what they're going to pick up.

It might be helpful to create a social story to explain what is happening, and to create a routine around your going back to work and practicing it ahead of time. For example, [LEGO Batman has an important message for all you Batfans on how you too can be a super hero!](#); [We Wear Masks - A Social Story about the coronavirus](#). More resources for children explaining Coronavirus and COVID-19

can also be found in our [Family tipsheet: Explaining COVID-19 and Coronavirus to children](#)

8. **Care for the Caregiver: Keep up your regular healthy habits.** It is important to maintain such healthy habits as trying to get enough sleep, eating well and exercising. These habits can help manage stress, depression, and anxiety. The Holland Bloorview tip sheet [Mental Health and Wellness Supports During the COVID-19 and Coronavirus Outbreak](#) offers some suggestions for the entire family.

We encourage you to visit our [website](#) to access all of our COVID-19 or Coronavirus-specific family tip sheets, which include virtual activity ideas, explaining COVID-19 to your kids, a sample home schedule, and emergency supports.

If you are looking for other family resources that have to do with childhood disability, please visit www.hollandbloorview.ca/resourcecentre.

Created by the Family Support Specialists and Family Leaders at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital on July 19, 2020. If you have a question or a resource to share, please feel free to reach out to us at resourcecentre@hollandbloorview.ca.