

On March 12, 2020, the Ontario government announced that all elementary and secondary public schools would be closed from March 14 through to April 5, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This action is a preventative measure. In that same announcement, the Minister of Education stated that schools would be receiving additional cleaning supplies for sanitation and hygiene.

When the announcement came, there had been no prior consultation or warning. Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to take this action, and others followed suit. Over the past week, ETFO has been in consultation with various government agencies at the federal and provincial levels to get as much information as possible about this unprecedented situation.

This document addresses some of the questions that we have received based upon what we know at this time. It is important to remember that this is a very quickly changing situation and we will continue to provide updates as information is available.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I report to work after the March Break?

ETFO members should not go to school for any reason during the closure. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has asked our members, along with all Ontarians, to limit contact with others to flatten the curve of infections.

Members are not required to perform their regular duties during the two-week mandatory closure. Your school administrator may be in touch to request your participation in a virtual staff meeting at some point.

At the end of the mandatory closure, the government will seek advice from the Chief Medical Officer to determine if schools will re-open. The Education Minister confirmed during a media conference on March 20, 2020, that the recommendation to extend the closure would be based solely on safety and well-being.

What if I am returning to Canada from international travel over March Break?

For those who were travelling outside Canada over March Break, please refer to the Public Health Agency of Canada's [travel advisory](#) for travellers returning to Canada. Federal and provincial public health leaders recommend that all travellers from outside Canada [self-isolate](#) for 14 days to slow the spread of COVID-19.

If you have experienced difficulty returning to Canada from March Break and your arrival date back in Canada means that your 14-day self-isolation period will not have been completed by the scheduled reopening of school on April 6, please contact your

school board's Human Resources office. You should not return to work until you have completed the required 14-day period of self-isolation.

If you were considering extending your March Break vacation due to the additional two-week school closure, please be aware that Prime Minister Trudeau has directed all Canadians travelling outside Canada to return immediately. There is also the expectation that educators are available and at home during the two-week school closure.

What measures has the government taken for other institutions?

On March 17, the Ontario government announced that it was introducing an order to declare an emergency under s 7.0.1 (1) the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*. In doing so, Ontario was able to implement restrictions that immediately closed the following establishments:

- all bars and restaurants, except to the extent that such facilities provide takeout and food delivery;
- all facilities providing indoor recreational programs;
- all public libraries;
- all private schools;
- all licensed child care centres;
- all movie cinemas;;
- all theatres, including those offering live performances of music, dance and other art forms; and
- all concert venues.

The closures are in effect until March 31, 2020, at which time there will be a review.

Will I be paid during this period?

ETFO permanent and long-term occasional members will continue to receive pay. The union continues to advocate for all occasional ETFO members to be paid during this time. Many school boards have released their plans to pay casual workers; some have not. The MOE has indicated that it will provide guidance to boards on this issue very soon.

Occasional members should also seek information on Employment Insurance (EI) eligibility and access resources that the federal government has announced to assist workers.

Further information related to EI and eligibility to submit a claim during this period, will be provided to members next week.

What are my responsibilities during the two-week school closures?

Your responsibility is to adopt practices that prevent infection and avoid being exposed (or exposing others) to COVID-19. To do so, you should closely follow the advice of public health authorities, included on this site

www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx

Please also refer to the government of Ontario link for information on what to do to reduce exposure at www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus

During the two-week closure period, you may be asked by your principal to participate in teleconferences or online/virtual meetings during the instructional day to provide staff with information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures, next steps etc.

Am I expected to provide online support or teaching to my students?

Not at this time. Use this time for planning and preparation and catching up on other work-related tasks, if possible. Your students will remain at home with their families and caregivers to prevent further infections in our communities.

The government of Ontario announced on March 20, that it has established a site for parents to use to support continued learning of their children. The dedicated online site for this is www.ontario.ca/page/learn-at-home

I want to prepare lessons, activities, videos or hold online learning sessions with my students during this closure, should I do that during the next two weeks?

ETFO recommends that members wait to hear additional information from your union and your school board or school administrator before preparing lessons or holding online learning sessions.

Is ETFO's work-to-rule strike action continuing during this school closure?

On Friday, March 20, ETFO announced that tentative agreements have been reached at the teacher/occasional teacher and education worker central tables. All work-to-rule strike action has been suspended pending successful ratification of these tentative central agreements.

I want to send a message to my students and their families. Am I able to do that?

You should not contact parents and students until additional information is provided by your school administrator. ETFO understands that members want to provide messages

of reassurance to their students and families, but we recommend that you wait until further direction is provided by the school's administration to ensure that all members are adhering to similar protocols.

During the two-week mandatory closure, the Minister of Education has announced that for the short term, an online digital "Learn at Home" initiative will provide resources for continued learning opportunities; these resources are available through TVO and TFO. If the closure extends beyond two weeks, teachers and education workers may be asked to assist students in other ways, but it is important to wait for direction on this issue.

What is the Learn at Home initiative?

This is an online portal that was established by the government of Ontario to offer resources to support parents and children seeking to continue learning during the closure. The resources are in line with the K-12 curriculum with a focus on learning the basics and STEM.

- The Learn at Home site is www.ontario.ca/page/learn-at-home
- The specific elementary link is www.ontario.ca/page/learn-at-home#section-0

I heard that the government of Quebec's emergency powers to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic allows teacher collective agreements to be suspended. Is that going to happen in Ontario? Can I be laid off during the two-week school closure?

ETFO leadership has spoken with Ontario government representatives and was assured that the government has **no intention to suspend collective agreements.**

ETFO will continue to communicate regularly with MOE staff to protect our members and their rights during any school closures related to COVID-19. The government and school boards have made no mention of lay-offs during the two-week school closure.

Will my local respond to my questions through emails and phone calls during the two-week mandatory school closure?

ETFO local leaders will be available to respond to member questions during school closures. Local offices will likely be closed to members during the mandatory closure period. Electronic or telephone communication will be the methods used by locals to communicate with members during this period.



Where can I find reliable information on COVID-19?

There are many sources that may be of assistance – please review the main ETFO website, as well as the ETFO Health and Safety website; links are listed below.

- www.etfo.ca/supportingmembers/employees/pages/coronavirus.aspx
- <http://etfohealthandsafety.ca/site/infection-prevention-and-control/>

Where can I find out information regarding OTIP and issues regarding COVID-19?

The most updated and accurate information can always be found on the OTIP website which has the following link available, www.otip.com/Alerts/coronavirus

How will I receive updates during the next two weeks from ETFO?

ETFO provincial will continue to utilize all communication channels to keep members informed. Important updates will be issued to members via the Collective Bargaining eNewsletter (for bargaining-related news), the ETFO eNewsletter and other email communications.

In addition to email, members may also consult the ETFO website, Facebook page or the @ETFOeducators Twitter account.

There is also a new dedicated page on our main website that members should regularly view at <http://etfo.ca/AboutETFO/ProvincialOffice/Pages/Covid19.aspx>

NOTE: If you are an ETFO member and are not receiving ETFO Provincial communications, please [fill out this form](http://etfo.ca/SupportingMembers/MemberInfo/Pages/UpdateMemberInfo.aspx) (<http://etfo.ca/SupportingMembers/MemberInfo/Pages/UpdateMemberInfo.aspx>). Once your membership is verified your personal email address will be added to our member-only communications list.