

**Q&A: Back to School Guidance for St. Joe's Employees**  
**Updated September 11<sup>th</sup> 2020**

As a parent, you participated in a school board survey indicating your choice on the model of education provided by your child's school. It has been a difficult task for families to make decisions on whether or not to send their children back to in-class learning environments and/or support 100% online learning at home.

You have had to make choices at a time where there is not a lot of clarity and past experience for guidance.

Open communication, cooperation and flexibility is required between staff, leaders and union partners to support a smooth transition back into the new school year.

**1. How will the hospital support employee whose families decide to keep their children at home?**

If you have made the decision to have your child at home for on-line learning for JK to Grade 8, they require parental supervision, and your current work schedule does not support this, the expectation of all staff is that all employees must request an unpaid leave of absence from their supervisor/and or manager. The employees approved for leave for this purpose will maintain their incumbent position with every effort made to return them to that position.

**2. Can I work remotely if I choose to keep my child home?**

If your job allows you to work remotely from home, you may be able to supervise your child participating in on-line learning education during your working hours. However, you may be called into work on short notice. You must have a childcare support plan in place for your regular scheduled work hours if you are called in to work.

**3. How will the hospital support employees whose families must keep their children at home for remote learning due to a medical concern?**

If there is a medical reason for your child to require on-line learning which requires parental supervision, your manager will help you determine if a family status accommodation may be required and with the support of Human Resources, they can facilitate the process to review those options with you and your union, as applicable.

**4. What is an accommodation for family status?**

Family status accommodations are triggered by requirements under the Human Rights Code. Employees and employers are expected to cooperate and make modifications to support the required bona fide need. Under applicable human rights legislation, employers may authorize unpaid leaves of absence, or provide other forms of accommodation, which may include modifying work duties, providing flexible scheduled working hours, and/or permitting employees to participate in remote work.

**5. How can the hospital support a staggered start to the return to the school year?**

With over 5000 employees, we have a variety of working hours and shift arrangements across the hospital. We will not be able to create a scenario and guidance document that supports a one size fits all approach.

However, your schedule has been provided to you as per your collective agreement and/or employment agreement obligations. If you require a modification to your schedule to support a staggered start to the school year we encourage the following:

1. Switch shifts with peers and review with your manager;
2. Seek alternative childcare arrangements;
3. Remote work may be an option based on your job;
4. Request a leave of absence (vacation, lieu, stats, leave without pay)
5. Request flexibility to the start/end times of your shift to support childcare needs.

**6. What should I do if I need to leave the work environment with little notice to pick up children from school for COVID related reasons?**



*As a parent, you may need to inform the school in advance of any additional care givers who are authorized to pick up your children. This may be a good opportunity to review who in your family, community and network who could provide you with additional support. Many parents in other industries/sectors are working remotely, they may be able to provide temporary support.*

**7. Can I flex my time to accommodate the lack of day care/before or after care options?**

It depends. We want to support all staff if a modification is possible. However, that may not be possible in each work situation.

Discuss these options with your manager, in some jobs, start and end times may be able to be adjusted through mutual agreement of the employee and manager. However, if you are in other roles, this flexible start/end cannot be done without consultation and in some cases agreement with your union.

All requests of this nature should be brought forward to your manager, and consulted with Human Resources as required. It is very important for these requests to be addressed appropriately as there may be collective agreement obligations to changes of shifts.

**8. If I am currently on an infectious disease related emergency leave (IDEL) and if I choose to keep my children home from school, can I remain on this leave?**

Based on the latest information available, when daycares reopened the *Employment Standards Act* clarified that if a parent decides to remain at home because they are uncomfortable sending their child to daycare, they would still be eligible for the leave (even though the daycare is open).

When schools reopen in September, parents who keep their children at home would still be eligible for the IDEL. This could change prior to schools reopening, but is the current information available. More updates may be available on [this link](#).

**9. Can my manager deny a leave of absence request?**

Leave may be denied based on operational requirements. There are provisions within the collective agreements and applicable leave policies that provide guidance to workers on both paid and unpaid leave.

The hospital leadership team is committed to support all employees in balancing the operational needs with being a flexible and adaptable to support our employees in this unprecedented situation.

If your leave of absence is denied, you may seek an explanation with from your manager. If you are not satisfied and/or you may meet the requirements of an accommodation, you may ask for the matter to be reviewed by a member of the Employee & Labour Relations team. If you are represented by a union, you may also bring forward any concerns through your local union stewards and/or representatives to address.

**10. What if I run out of vacation/lieu time and still need time away to care for my child?**

If you use all of your vacation and lieu time you will have to consider applying for an unpaid leave of absence to continue caring for your child in the home setting.

We want to affirm to staff that managers and supervisors are going to make their best effort to support your family needs. We want to ensure that you use the appropriate leave for the appropriate circumstances. It is very likely there may be decreases in your anticipated income as a result of having to take leaves without pay and/or reducing your hours due to child care requirements.

We are looking at staffing strategies to provide more work opportunities to part-time and casual staff to support our staffing needs. More to follow on this.

**11. Can I use sick time to cover absence from work to support my child that has symptoms and/or is sent home from school.**

No. Sick leave is for absences related to your own personal medical illness and/or injury. You will not be paid and/or granted approval for sick leave for absences related to your children and/or dependent care needs.

**12. How can we support the expected testing and isolation requirements?**

If the employee is the primary care giver for the child, they will have to take their child for testing.

1. Complete testing outside of your scheduled working hours, where possible
2. Contact your manager to request leave;
3. If your child is required to be isolated for symptoms, you may be required to self-isolate, please refer to question 10 & 11

**13. If my child is exposed to a positive COVID-19 case, can I still work?**

- Healthcare workers should notify the COVID Hotline (COVID Hotline: 905-522-1155 Ext. 36131).
- The COVID Hotline nurse will advise if the HCW is required to be tested, self-isolate or can continue to come into work.
- Your local public health unit will advise if your child requires testing and self-isolation. Information on this will be driven by public health guidelines, we anticipate further guidance on this question.

*Updated for accuracy on September 14<sup>th</sup>*

**14. If my child tests positive for COVID-19, can I still work?**

No. Healthcare workers living with someone with a confirmed positive result of COVID-19, must stay home and self-isolate until cleared by Public Health. If your child tests positive for COVID-19, Healthcare workers should notify the COVID Hotline (COVID Hotline: 905-522-1155 Ext. 36131).

**15. What is the Public Health guidance around student self-isolation?**

Children in a household where a parent or other member has a confirmed positive result should stay home and isolate for 14 days according to the most recent information available.

**16. What happens if an outbreak is declared at my child's school and it is closed temporarily?**

The public health unit where you reside will advise if you are required to self-isolate or recommend that you be tested.

Please contact the COVID Hotline: 905-522-1155 Ext. 36131.

If you are not required by public health to self-isolate, however if you need to stay home to care for your child, you can:

- Request leave (vacation, lieu, stats, leave without pay)
- Switch shifts for posted shifts with manager approval and/or
- Work remotely where work is available

**17. Will St. Joe's staff and physicians be able to bring their family and children to the hospital for COVID-19 testing?**

St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton is exploring ways to offer staff and physicians the option to bring their immediate family members, including children, to a swabbing centre location on campus for expedited COVID testing. The swabbing centre that would welcome family members of St. Joe's staff and physicians would not be located at a community COVID Assessment Centre.

More details coming soon...

**18. How is St. Joe's supporting mental health and wellness for healthcare workers during this stressful time?**

We understand that the new school year may bring about feelings of increased frustration and anxiety. We have mental health and wellness resources for our staff and physicians:

- Resources on [Stjoes.ca/Coronavirus](https://stjoes.ca/Coronavirus) and links at the bottom of every COVID Email Update
- Reach out to [Mental Health Services for Healthcare Workers \(stjoes.ca/coronavirus for self-referral\)](https://stjoes.ca/coronavirus-for-self-referral) for confidential support.

Our own St. Joe's experts have been in media offering advice to both parents and students about how to cope with returning to school, and we encourage you to [read this](#). Among their tips are suggestions to stay informed, take care of yourself, and seek help if needed. We offer some of those tips next.

**Tips from St. Joe's Experts**

Dr. Karen Rowa is a psychologist and clinical director of the [St. Joseph's Healthcare Anxiety Treatment and Research Clinic](#). Kyle Harber, a youth mentor at the Youth Wellness Centre, (YWC), is working with post-secondary students grappling with the uncertainties of remote learning. Some of the tips they offer:

- Be prepared and be knowledgeable by reading information from the school boards, but accept that there will be change to those plans and ambiguity as schools work through the process.
- Take care of yourself: acknowledge your stress, talk about it with others, get sleep, exercise.
- Keep a routine as much as possible
- Seek safe ways to be social
- Don't be afraid to ask for help

**More from St. Joe's Experts in the media about mental wellness during back to school:**

- [The anxious return to school](#)
- [School is back — and with loads of twists. Here's one expert's guide for students worried about anxiety and routines](#)

**Mental Health resources for parents:**

- [School Mental Health Ontario](#)- Do you have questions about how to support student mental health during COVID-19 and the return to school?
- [HWDSB: Mental Health and Well-Being Resources for School Reopening](#) – Tips on creating healthy routines and talking to your child about COVID

**Other links and resources available about back to school in our region:**

- [Ontario Government's Guide to Opening Ontario Schools](#)
- [Ontario information on reopening schools](#)
- [Hamilton Wentworth District School Board](#)
- [Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board](#)
- [SickKids updated considerations for a safe school reopening](#)