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CUPE·SCFP

January 3, 2022

Dear CUPE members,

While CUPE/OSBCU continues to advocate for students and workers with the Ministry of Education, our ability to do anything at the local level is limited; most of the protections for keeping workers safe on the job are found in your local collective agreements. The power really lies with the locals, school boards and principals.

Following Thursday's announcement by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and today's announcement by the premier, here are some key things that you can do to keep yourself, students and colleagues safe at work:

- **Screening:** The Ministry of Education promised extra staff to assist with new screening protocols; locals should ask their boards how or if screening will take place and where the additional staffing is to handle it.
- **Masking:** Boards will be supplied with non-fit test N95 masks for staff to wear as an optional face-covering. Ask your principal now to make sure these masks will be available to you if/when you will be on site when schools re-open on January 5.
- **Work refusals:** CUPE/OSBCU can't advise members to refuse work, but you should know your rights for refusing unsafe work. For example, you have to have grounds for your refusal, the refusal has to be done on site (not from home), the hazard has to be reported to your supervisor and there has to be an opportunity for the supervisor to address the hazard. More information has been sent to local presidents on how the right way to refuse unsafe work, so check with your local leaders.
- **Sick leave:** There are new rules around quarantining, self-isolation, and staying home when exhibiting COVID symptoms. Don't go to work sick and don't be coerced into an early return. Use your sick leave, your short-term disability and any quarantine language in your collective agreement.
- **Ventilation units:** Is there a ventilation/air filtration unit in your classroom or workspace? Keep it on! Do not allow it to be turned off for any reason.
- **Vaccination:** Some boards are looking at hosting COVID vaccination clinics; check to see if your board is planning one, or propose that it does (provided there are the appropriate people to staff it).

- **Reporting:** The Ministry has suspended the reporting of COVID cases in schools while it looks into “other tracking methods.” Check with your board to see if they are tracking cases and share the information with your OSBCU area VP.
- **Sufficient staffing:** Not enough staff in schools could violate rules for a safe workplace. Consult your joint health and safety committee if you are concerned that staff shortages are making your workplace unsafe.

These are just some ideas for collective action by local members. Don't hesitate to use your power! The Ford government has shown pretty clearly that it is not interested in doing what it takes to make schools safe, so it's up to us to do what we can for ourselves, our co-workers, and students.

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