

How employers and employees should manage self-quarantines

As cases of COVID-19 continue to rise across the country, many employers are making decisions around when to ask employees to quarantine themselves for their own protection and that of others.

But employers who are making these policies may not be considering the psychological impact a quarantine could have on employees. Instead, employers should consider how employees will be able to cope with being isolated from the workplace, as work is a critical part of employees' social connection and identity.

AWARENESS

Candace Sellar, program manager of the worker and publicly safety standards implemented by certification and product testing organization CSA Group, provides some coaching for employers to consider:

- Reduce any additional stressors by proactively addressing employee concerns – e.g., around compensation and benefits: will the employee be paid? Is the employee using incidental sick time or vacation time?
- Clearly define work expectations – e.g., Is the employee expected to be online and participate remotely in meetings?
- If your organization has one, refer to your Psychological Health and Safety Management System (PHSMS) and provide the employee with appropriate supports (e.g., employee assistance con-

tacts for mental and physical health care). If you're not already familiar with it, review the [National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health And Safety in the Workplace](#).

- While respecting confidentiality and privacy rights, address any stigma that other staff might have around self-isolation in order to ease the employee's return to work.

ACCOUNTABILITY

There's likely a large percentage of small, medium and large employers whose leaders have never had to manage employees who've been asked to quarantine themselves from the workplace.

One consistent factor is that humans value social connections. Disruption of those connections can result in emotional strain on employees' mental health, so prevention and pro-active measures to mitigate this risk are prudent for both employers and employees. As well, it's helpful when employers encourage their employees to keep lines of

Share your experience about
loneliness in the workplace

Complete the

**Perceived Isolation-
Loneliness Effect Survey**

Compiled results will be published in a
future column

communication open during periods of isolation.

“Without question, one of the most important things employees and employers can do is stay in regular contact,” says Anne Tennier, president and CEO of Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. “Employers should not assume any employee who has been asked to quarantine themselves from work is okay. Reaching out to them regularly and staying connected can help avoid any stigma associated from being quarantined.”

Employers can support employees who may be struggling to focus on the virus epidemic, but it’s a moment in time, and it shall pass. The employees’ core job is to take care of their health first and stay engaged in their work if possible.

“We also encourage employees to stay engaged with their leaders and co-workers. Leverage technology. Let them know how they’re doing. They don’t have to feel alone,” says Ms. Tennier.

ACTION

If you’ve been asked to self quarantine, here are some tips for how to [best manage](#) your time physically away from your workplace.

- **Get the facts** — Get your medical advice from a trusted source only. If you’re concerned with any symptoms

and unsure what to do, reach out, such as by calling your provincial nurse line.

- **Create a daily routine** — Set daily goals. Don’t let the basics slip. Keep your daily hygiene, cleaning schedule, and work schedule if you feel well, and stay busy.
- **Move** — Exercise and movement are good for your mind and body. If you’re feeling okay, stay as active as possible. There are lot of online exercise programs that you can leverage.
- **Social connections** — Stay active and engaged with your personal, professional and work support network. If you start to feel overwhelmed, isolated, worried or lonely and unsure who you can chat with, call your employee and family assistance program number or local support line. You never have to be alone.
- **Sleep schedule** — Maintain your sleep routine as best you can.
- **Mental fitness** — Be active in supporting your mental health and resiliency. Some things that can promote positive mental health include practising [gratitude](#), monitoring self-talk, taking an online course on mental fitness, reading a book that promotes mental fitness and keeping a daily journal.