

Dear Victoria University USW Members,

The work that Vic USW members are doing to maintain the operations of the University in the challenging circumstances created by the spread of COVID-19 is impressive and highlights the dedication we all have to the Vic community. Of particular note are the front-line employees who have been designated as critical to the day to day maintenance of the campus and to the care of the students who remain in residence. The fact that these USW colleagues of ours face increased risk to their personal safety because they must be on campus to perform their duties and travel to and from work needs to be acknowledged and appreciated.

Health & Safety

The Union has persistently advocated on behalf of the membership to ensure that health and safety standards are protected with the upmost care during this challenging time. We are in regular contact with the University and making all efforts to address members' concerns in a timely manner as they arise. Our focus has been on ensuring that the University properly implements social distancing, that members' work is conducted in space that allows for social distancing and that personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfecting sanitary products are readily available to staff. The University has stated that they will provide face masks to staff who are unable to maintain 2 metres (6.5 feet) of social distancing while working. We acknowledge that the University's policy is within the guidelines issued by Public Health and that currently it is difficult to buy face masks, but we believe that best practice is for face masks to be mandatory for all staff working on campus once a supply of them is secured.

In response to members' concerns about possibly catching COVID-19 while travelling to work on public transit, the Union requested that the University provide free parking and that they cover the costs of members taking either a taxi or Uber to work. The University agreed to that request and has implemented those measures.

The University's Self Declaration Form

The Union has expressed to the University its concerns about the Self-Declaration Form in its current state and has asked the University to amend the document because it is not in line with both legislation and precedent setting case law. The University has informed us that their legal advisers are currently reviewing the document.

One of our concerns with the document is that in the section titled "Absence Type (Sick Leave)", two of the options require disclosure of a medical diagnosis (COVID-19 or cold or flu like symptoms). According to the relevant legislation and case law, an employee is only required to state their clinical signs and symptoms (for example, a runny nose or cough), medical restrictions and limitations, the sick leave start date and the expected return to work date. We asked the University to change the wording in this section so that it does not include the disclosure of a diagnosis.

The section of the form titled "Consent to Release Medical Information" includes the wording "(Please check off)", which refers to the waiver language and accompanying check box beneath the section title. If an employee filling out the form checks off the box, they authorize their

local public health office to release their isolation status to Vic's Human Resources Department. The University did not include on the form the obligatory language indicating that such consent is voluntary. We raised with the University our concern that, because of the missing wording and the possibility that the inclusion of "(Please check off)" could lead an employee to understand their consent was required, employees who give their consent could be doing so without a full understanding of their right to not grant it.

In addition to asking the University to address the above noted problems with the Self Declaration Form, we have asked them to destroy the completed forms that they have received where an employee checked off one of the options in the "Absence Type (Sick Leave)" section that includes an diagnosis and/or where they gave their consent to have their isolation status released to the University, and redistribute to those people the revised form to complete.

Updated Information from Public Health Agencies

Every day we learn new things about the ever-evolving pandemic. It is important to diligently implement Public Health's recommended precautions to ensure that the virus is not spread to your families, co-workers, friends and community members. Carriers of the virus do not have to be showing symptoms to be able to transmit the disease to another person.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- fever/chill
- fatigue
- headache
- a new cough
- sore throat
- runny nose
- muscle aches
- anosmia (loss of smell)
loss of taste
- digestive symptoms: loss of appetite, vomiting, abdominal pains, and diarrhea
- shortness of breath.

If you are unsure if you have contracted the virus, please take the Provincial government's self-assessment found here:

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>.

Precautionary Measures to Take to Avoid Being Infected with COVID-19:

- wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds with soap and warm water or alcohol-based hand rub

- do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth if your hands are not clean
- cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze
- avoid close contact with people and keep a social distance of 2 metres (6.5 feet)
- frequently wipe down touched items with a disinfectant
- wipe down your cell phone regularly with a disinfectant
- avoid non-essential travel
- if you need to restock your fridge and cupboard, order your groceries and supplies online, or be mindful of safe social distancing if you grocery shop at a store
- self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19
- avoid getting into elevators with more than two people
- stay home if you are sick!

Mental Health Tips for Working from Home and Other Helpful Information

For those currently working from home, attached are documents with tips for maintaining good mental health while working from home, helping children cope with stress and for knowing the difference between self-monitoring, self-isolation and isolation.

Attached is a pamphlet for the Steelworkers' Lifeline Foundation, which provides confidential information, referrals and support services either by phone or in person. The service is available to United Steelworker members and their families free of charge. A pamphlet for the University's Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is also attached.