

# COVID-19 HUMAN RESOURCES OPERATIONS GUIDE

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every business in 2020. With courses preparing to open, the challenge for everyone will be to deliver a high-quality, consistent and enjoyable experience for all players, while maintaining a safe and secure environment for staff and visitors. The provision and consistent use of Protective Personal Equipment (“PPE”) and the maintenance of physical distancing will present challenges, but with proactive action and a strong commitment to certain principles, the 2020 golf season has the potential to be successful and a welcome relief to people who are missing social connection and leisure.

## PREPARING TO OPEN? CONSIDERING STAFFING LEVELS

Ensuring appropriate staffing levels on a day to day basis has always been challenging, given such factors as weather and fluctuating customer demand. The pandemic has made this more complicated, as it may be difficult to predict activity on the course on a day to day and week to week basis. While there is certainly some pent-up guest demand, it may be that business volumes remain low, or at least unpredictable, as people struggle with continued concerns about infection and financial insecurity.

There are several programs in place at this time that may assist management in maintaining a strong core staff, who need to ensure a certain income level. Groups of staff may be able to be placed in work share programs, which provide EI benefits for the days not worked. In summary, a group of employees who essentially do the same work, and would otherwise be working full time hours, agree to reduce their hours equally. All staff in a work share group must agree to the work share and the plan must be submitted to Service Canada for approval.



For the earlier part of the season, staff who may have been placed on lay off and are collecting the Canada

Emergency Response Benefit (“CERB”) are able to work and earn up to \$1,000 per month without these earnings impacting on their CERB payments. The CERB pays \$500 per week for up to 16 weeks. An amendment to the program now allows people who have claimed and are receiving the benefit to also work part time without those earnings reducing the amount they are receiving under the CERB.



The Government of Canada has also created a wage subsidy program that may be available to clubs that are operating but at revenue levels that are decreased over corresponding months in the prior year. Generally, the club would need to demonstrate that revenues have fallen by at least 30 per cent, and if this is the case can claim a subsidy of up to 75 per cent of pre-COVID-19 wages up to a maximum. There are some complex calculations involved, and careful study of the program details is required.



If further hiring is required, it may be appropriate to ask candidates if they have any conditions or issues that would present a challenge working within the restrictions and circumstances presented by the pandemic, such as whether they have any pre-existing conditions that would require accommodation to keep them safe from contracting the virus.

# ON-BOARDING AND TRAINING

Providing a robust and detailed on-boarding and training program is essential for the smooth operation of the club, and for the provision of a consistently excellent experience for guests. This is usually accomplished by way of group meetings, during which management is both able to convey needed information and create a sense of teamwork and camaraderie in the staff group.

The maintenance of physical distancing will make these meetings very difficult. Using technologies such as Zoom can be a very helpful substitute. Basic Zoom licenses are free and upgraded business ones are relatively inexpensive. Delivering training virtually in a successful way requires some different preparation. Some issues to consider are:

- Ensure that your meeting is set up in a secure way. Using such features as the “*waiting room*”, which enables the meeting leader to control the entry of participants, and the locking feature once all participants have arrived, are strong ways to prevent “*Zoom bombing*”, which is when an uninvited guest crashes your meeting. Ensure that meetings always have passwords. For further information, here is a helpful article:



- One of the most important aspects of group training is interaction. If you have a large group, this can be difficult. “*Zoom Rooms*” allow you to break your group up into smaller groups, and these groups can be asked to discuss specific issues and then return and report to the larger group.
- Zoom also has polling and chat features, and an ability to share the presenter’s screen so that documents can be viewed by the group.

On-site orientations and facilities tours should be done keeping in mind physical distancing requirements, so groups of more than three employees should be avoided.

All orientations should emphasize the policies and protocols that have been added as a result of COVID-19. Issues to be discussed include:

- Locations of sanitizing stations and instructions for use
- Hand-washing protocols
  - Use of PPE (masks etc.), if appropriate
  - Sanitizing of equipment
  - Physical distancing requirements (always stay six feet away from other people)
  - Rules for golfers and how to enforce them
  - Consequences of failure to observe safety protocols
  - The club’s action plan should there be an incidence of COVID-19 at the club



# APPLICATION OF RELEVANT HEALTH & SAFETY LEGISLATION

*THE INFORMATION PROVIDED HERE AS GENERAL PRINCIPLES; SPECIFIC PROVINCIAL HEALTH AND SAFETY LEGISLATION SHOULD ALSO BE CONSULTED.*

It has always been the case that the responsibility for safety in any workplace is a shared effort. In the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is even more the case, and this responsibility must also be extended to all customers and visitors to the property.

The three central principles of health and safety legislation are the right to know (be properly trained and provided with the appropriate PPE), the right to participate (be represented by a representative or Joint Health and Safety Committee (“JHSC”) and the right to refuse unsafe work.

Most jurisdictions in Canada require that workplaces with 20 or more employees have a JHSC. Provincial requirements vary, but most dictate that the committee be comprised of at least two people, and at least half of the members be employees, as opposed to management. With the additional emphasis on safety in 2020, clubs should be sure that they have a JHSC in place. The duties of a JHSC committee include recognizing workplace hazards and participating in safety programs and in workplace refusals and work stoppages.

Clubs with fewer than 20 employees should appoint one Health and Safety representative to assist management in workplace safety.

More information on workplace health and safety can be found here:



It should be noted that health and safety matters are provincially regulated so the specific legislation for the club's location should be consulted.

There is an argument to suggest that in these unprecedented times, appropriate protections might extend to ensuring that colleagues are healthy. If desired, a daily temperature taking for everyone as they arrive at work would be acceptable. If someone is found to have an elevated temperature, they should be sent home. Out of an abundance of caution, these employees should be paid for three hours' work.

Asking club visitors to attest to their health status and that they have not traveled outside of Canada in the last 14 days is another way of helping to ensure a safe workplace.

In the context of COVID-19, the right to refuse unsafe work becomes more complex. The very existence of the virus in society might make attending work psychologically “unsafe” for some people. If this is the case, it is likely that anyone in that circumstance would be eligible to collect the CERB or another benefit.

Specifically, some factors that **could** give rise to a work refusal include (but not limited to):

- The state of the COVID-19 situation in the employees' city, region, or province and workplace (i.e.: the number of active/new cases)
- The age and health of the staff person
- The measures taken by the employer to prevent the transition of COVID-19 (workplace hygiene, hand-washing facilities, and PPE)
- The number of workers in the workplace and whether social distancing is possible
- Whether an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19



If a worker feels that they are being asked to work in unsafe conditions, they should first contact the JHSC or safety representative to address the matter. If the fix is simple (adding more sanitizing stations, as an example) the representative is empowered to do so. If it is more complex, such as golfers refusing to adhere to social distancing protocols, management and the entire JHSC should be involved.

Employers should look at each refusal on a case by case basis, follow the investigatory and reporting process as outlined by the relevant provincial legislation, and determine the basis and level of risk for the refusal. In order for a refusal to work to be upheld, the issue must be characterized as a “danger” rather than simply a “risk”, and management must have had adequate opportunity to address it. In the most serious of cases, if they are not addressed, a provincial Health and Safety Officer (“HSO”) may order the business closed until the danger is addressed.

If there is no basis for the work refusal, and the workplace has taken appropriate measures as set-out by the Government of Canada (i.e.: regular cleaning, hand-washing facilities, social distancing etc.), it is safe to determine there is no risk to come to work for the great majority of staff, and any further refusal to work could constitute job abandonment and be cause for dismissal.

In this very complex environment, employers may not want to rush to discipline staff over health concerns. Any situation should be handled carefully and with heightened sensitivity.

A few workers may have legitimate safety concerns as a result of their personal health (for example, any employees who are immuno-compromised). No matter how many safeguards are put in place, the risk of contracting COVID-19 cannot be entirely eliminated. In these cases, the employer will likely have a duty to accommodate the employee up to the point of undue hardship.

This accommodation could be placing the staff member in a position where they have no contact with the public (in a call centre taking tee times, for example). If such a position does not exist, the club does not to create one, and the employee may have to be placed on leave. In this case, the staff member would have access to the CERB or other government benefits.

If a worker reasonably exercises their right to refuse work, they must continue to be paid while the situation is resolved. Hourly workers should be paid for the remainder of their existing shifts.

Staff are responsible to ensure safety on the property and management must support the staff in this effort, even if players are resistant to protocols and restrictions. Players must adhere to all posted safety requirements, and staff should have unqualified authority to ensure that these precautions are maintained. All players should sign a waiver to acknowledge that there is an inherent risk in all activities at this time and that staff are fully empowered to enforce all rules. Management must support staff in this; as is a situation where the customer may not always be right.



## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

In “*normal times*”, one in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem or illness each year. For youth in particular, mental health issues are the most disabling group of disorders; suicide is the second most common cause of death for 15 – 24-year olds in Canada, second only to accidents. A significant percentage of the workforce at many courses may be part of this vulnerable demographic.

The implications of the pandemic on mental health issues have been significant. Mental health issues are exacerbated by isolation, financial insecurity and concerns about personal and family health issues. The prolonged period of cancellation for support programs and services has added to the problem.

As people head back to work, there may be increased incidences of mental health issues. Management must:

- Provide a psychologically healthy working environment by providing the appropriate PPEs and modeling strong support of all safety rules and regulations;
- Create and maintain an environment where discussions and check-ins on mental health issues are welcomed and not subject to negative stigma;

- Check in frequently with all staff to ensure that they are doing ok;
- Be alert to signs of worsening mental health in staff:
  - Changes in performance, including frequency of mistakes, attendance and punctuality issues
  - Changes in physical appearance/grooming
  - Changes in demeanor, including increasing distancing or unusual emotions such as anger, sadness or hopelessness
- Treat mental health issues with the same care and concern that you would a physical injury
- Share helpful apps such as Mind Shift (free, iOS & Android); Breathe2Relax (free, iOS & Android); Happify (free, iOS & Android); Calm (\$12.99/month; iOS & Android – free trials available).
- Self-educate on mental health issues; consider taking a course such as Mental Health First Aid.



## COMMUNICATIONS

As with most business issues, communication is key. In terms of communication strategy surrounding the pandemic, several implications of communication strategy should be considered.

Communication **at all times** must be clear, accurate, transparent and as positive as possible.

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### PREPARATION – BE READY AND ABLE TO COMMUNICATE QUICKLY AND THOROUGHLY

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It is essential that clubs have detailed records of everyone’s attendance at the property on a daily basis. In the event of COVID-19 exposure, contact tracing is required in order to determine who might have exposed to the virus and when Clubs must maintain a listing of the arrival and departure times of players, the individuals who played together and the on-course staff who were working at the time.

For each person, a phone number and an email address should be obtained.

A What's App or similar group communication tool should be created so that urgent messages can be conveyed to staff quickly and simultaneously.

In the event of an incident of exposure at the club, clear and timely communication is very important. Advanced preparation is key, and some sample wording is provided in the FAQs – Exposure and “What If” section below.

## ON GOING COMMUNICATION

A weekly communication to all team members which would combine any updates in terms of changes in restrictions or requirements as well as words of encouragement should be sent by management. Offering thanks for the hard work of your staff in what are likely to be more challenging than

usual circumstances is important. Any employee engagement strategies that you usually use are more important than ever at this time. The tone should be optimistic and positive but should not sugar coat or avoid any negative news.

Creating a sense of camaraderie among staff is more difficult with physical distancing requirements in place. Again, Zoom or other video chat programs might be helpful. Scheduling a regular virtual meeting with staff will provide opportunities to share information, allow the staff to ask questions, and to provide some social interaction. Staff can be invited to enjoy a beverage of their choice at the end of a meeting, provided it is appropriate and safe to do so. Zoom also allows users to use a background photo of their choice – perhaps staff can be encouraged to use a picture of a notable golf hole and have their colleagues guess the location. In this time of tension, extra effort to enjoy some lighthearted discussion is helpful.

## FAQS - EXPOSURE & “WHAT IF”

**Q** A staff member or visitor to the facility contracts COVID-19 or is “presumed positive” and awaiting testing:

- A**
- Advise the local public health authorities and follow any instructions given.
  - If the course is open, allow play to continue but do not allow any further rounds to begin.
  - Advise staff working that there has been a case reported. Any staff who feels uncomfortable should be allowed to go home immediately.
  - The club should be closed after the last round has been completed; golfers on the property should be advised of the positive case and advised that they will receive further information as it is available.
  - Send What's App message to all staff.
    - “It has come to our attention that a staff member/guest at the property has been diagnosed with/is presumed positive for COVID-19. We are reviewing our materials to determine who has been in contact with this individual and will be contacting those people directly. Until we can determine

extent of contact, anyone who was in the facility on XX days should immediately self-isolate. The club will be closed for the next 48 hours in order to thoroughly clean and sanitize.”

- Review recent list of visitors to the club and send email message to anyone who may have come in contact with the person who is ill.
  - “It has come to our attention that someone with whom you may have had contact when you visited our club on XX date has tested positive/is presumed positive for COVID-19. Please contact your local public health authority and follow all instructions. As more information becomes available, we will share it with you, as appropriate. In the meantime, please feel free to contact XX at the club if you have questions.”
- In both cases, protect privacy.
  - In the staff What's App, do not identify the individual. Generally, news travels fast and staff will figure out who the person is quickly, but it is not up to management to identify them.
  - In the email group to visitors, use the BCC: function when sending a group email.





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## FAQS - EXPOSURE & “WHAT IF”

- Arrange for a thorough cleaning of the club with a professional cleaning service.
- Review all staff people who may have come in contact with the person who is ill for the last 3 – 4 days before the person started showing symptoms. Advise these people that they have been exposed, should call public health authorities for further instructions and should not return to work until 14 days after exposure. These individuals will likely be eligible to claim benefits for the time they are unable to work, and if this is the case you may need to have your payroll service issues them a Record of Employment (“ROE”) explaining the reason that they are unable to work.
- If any of these people become ill, you will need to do the same round of communications to the people with whom they have been in contact, so it would be advisable to do the same “contact tracing” investigation for them.

**Q** *A staff member becomes directly exposed to someone who is diagnosed with COVID-19:*

**A** • The staff member should not return to work until a 14-day period of self-isolation has been completed. If the person becomes ill, you should follow the protocol set out above.

**Q** *A staff member travels outside of the country, or inside the country by plane:*

**A** • The staff member should not return to work for 14 days.

**Q** *A staff member travels to other provinces within Canada, by car:*

**A** • Apply appropriate judgment. If the destination is one that is still experiencing a high number of cases, consider requiring that the person not return for 14 days.

**Q** *A staff member does not comply with required safety protocols:*

**A** • Swift progressive discipline should be employed– there would normally be a more drawn out process, but because of the seriousness of this situation, a more aggressive

stance should be taken:

- On first infraction, a written warning should be given, stating that any further infraction will result in termination, for cause.
- Any subsequent infraction would result in immediate termination.

**Q** *A golfer refuses to adhere to required safety protocols such as practicing physical distancing:*

**A** • Staff should approach the customer and reiterate the requirement in question. If the player refuses, management should be called. If the player continues to refuse to comply, he or she should be asked to leave the property.

**Q** *A potential customer calls to ask what the course will do to ensure their safety:*

**A** • Consider composing a “one pager” of precautions being taken and adding a copy of the waiver that players are required to sign. Sample wording for a verbal or written response:

- “XX Golf Club takes the health and safety of its guests and staff very seriously. To this end, all players will be required to attest to their own health and to follow all protocols while at the property. These protocols include a commitment to frequent hand sanitizing and maintaining physical distancing from others.”

**Q** *A case of COVID-19 happens at the property, and the press calls about it:*

**A** • “We became aware that a staff member at our property/a guest at our property tested positive for COVID-19 on (date). We were able to contact trace immediately and effectively and have advised anyone who was exposed to take the appropriate steps. We closed the property immediately for a deep cleaning, and plan to re-open in 48 hours. We will ensure that any staff who were exposed self-isolates for 14 days. The health of the ill staff member/guest, and the ongoing safety of our staff and our guests is our highest priority and we look forward to welcoming our loyal customers back to our property soon.”

# MORE ASSISTANCE

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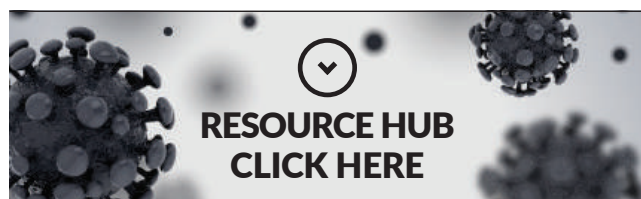
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for specific questions and assistance.

Crowe Soberman has also prepared a resource hub for clients, which is being continuously updated with information on government benefits and support:



This article from the Government of Canada provides some helpful information on COVID-19 management issues.

