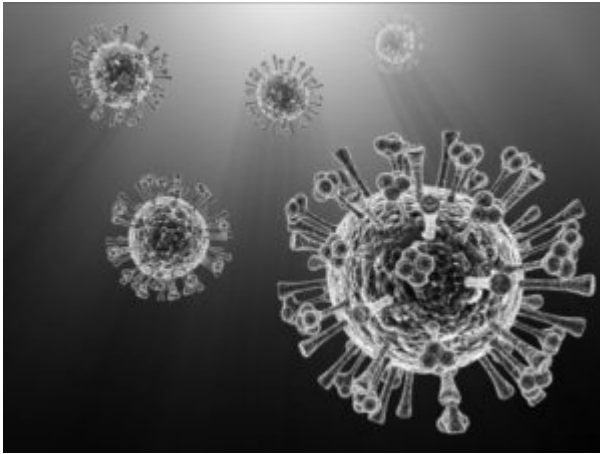


Federal Efforts On COVID-19 To Assist Employers & Employees



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On March 11, 2020, the Federal Government announced the establishment of a \$1-billion package to address the COVID-19 virus outbreak (which is now a global pandemic according to the World Health Organization). Part of the funds, \$275 million, will be directed at additional research, such as vaccine development. A further \$200 million will go towards federal medical supplies, supports for Indigenous communities and proactive education.

Most important for employers, the package also comes with a waiver of the one-week waiting period for employment insurance benefits under the *Employment Insurance Act*. According to the government, this is to assist employees and businesses affected by the outbreak. It should lessen the burden, and expectation, on employers that they should be responsible for maintaining wages while employees are isolated due to COVID-19 related concerns.

Other measures are also being explored, including income supports for those who are not eligible for EI sickness benefits such as the self-employed and “gig economy” workers. Although no specifics have been provided, the package will also adjust the rules governing the Service Canada work-sharing program. The wage supplements available under the program to employees whose hours are cut to avoid layoffs will be doubled from 38 to 76 weeks for companies affected by COVID-19.