

Frequently Asked Questions

Return to classroom work

Question 1: Can professionals who have no health issues continue to telecommute, if they so wish? (secondary schools – administrative centres)

According to government guidelines, employers must promote and encourage telecommuting wherever possible. If your supervisor requests your presence in the workplace, you must report for work, unless you are eligible for exemption (over the age of 60, chronic illness, etc.)

Reference: see the FAQ on the MEES website: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/questions-answers-education-families-covid-19/>

Question 2: What is the plan for professionals who live with a relative who is considered to be a vulnerable person?

Professionals should speak to their employer first and request to continue working from home. Employers are obligated to consider the professional's request and be flexible and fair. Employers must follow health and hygiene standards and the social distancing measures recommended by public health authorities, so as not to endanger vulnerable persons. According to the MEES, "school administrators and human resource managers are asked to consider these requests, if possible, when assigning tasks, given that some duties require classroom presence while other tasks, such as providing support to students at home, may be done remotely".

Question 3: Regarding professionals who have diabetes or other illnesses that place them at higher risk from complications if they catch COVID-19, do they have to work in schools?

A.: No, it is recommended, for staff safety, that vulnerable persons (people over the age of 60, those with chronic illnesses, those with severe immune deficiency, persons who are pregnant or nursing) postpone their return to work at least until September. If necessary, you should notify your employer, so that the work can be redistributed and you can be assigned duties such as telecommuting.

Here is the link to the INSPQ's list of chronic illnesses (as of April 22, 2020) [link in French]:

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https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2967_protection_travailleurs_sante_maladies_chroniques.pdf

Question 4: I'm a psychoeducator. I have an autoimmune disease. If my specialist doctor thinks it is better for me to wait until September to return to work, do I need to ask them to write a letter or produce some kind of document?

It is always preferable to have a medical certificate or a letter from your doctor confirming your medical condition(s). If you are able to obtain such a document, this will assist in processing your request. However, the MEES has asked employers to be flexible and fair, and as such you are not obligated to have a medical certificate and employers should take you at your word. If there is doubt, medical proof may be required.

Question 5: Do staff assigned to secondary schools have to report to the workplace?

Secondary schools will remain closed until September and students will consolidate their distance learning through enhanced educational support. Staff who are usually assigned to these establishments are generally telecommuting, subject to the needs of their school. See the FAQ on the MEES website: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/questions-answers-education-families-covid-19/>

Question 6 a): Could secondary school professional staff be forced to work in an elementary school?

Yes, pursuant to order 2020-008, the school board may assign you to duties other than your regular duties but should normally contact the union prior to doing so.

Question 6 b): Can a professional refuse to work in an elementary school?

No, subject to medical conditions. According to ministry guidelines, workers who cannot adhere to social distancing measures (two metres) are required to have necessary protection. Therefore, we can request protective equipment such as nitrile gloves, face masks or visors, etc. Notify your union if protective measures are insufficient.

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Question 7: What should professionals who are pregnant or breastfeeding do? Should they take preventive leave?

According to the MEES, reporting to school is not recommended for staff members whose health condition makes them vulnerable (chronic illness, severe immune deficiency, pregnancy or nursing, people over the age of 60). They can be assigned to duties other than those they usually perform. For health and safety reasons, these people are encouraged to postpone their return to school until September 2020.

See also the Institut National de Santé Publique's website:

<https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/publications/2920-recommendations-workplace-pregnant-nursing-summary-covid19>

Question 8: If professional staff are requested to go and “teach” in a classroom, are they able to refuse?

No, not if the person has the required skills. Under order 2020-008, the school board can reassign you to duties other than your regular duties, but, normally, it should contact the union first. We are in times of crisis, which requires flexibility and fairness from both sides.

Question 9: Can people who don't want to return to their office request to continue telecommuting?

Yes, they can make a request, subject to the employer's management rights. The latter can require that work be done in the workplace.

Question 10: Can the government give priority to employees of educational establishments for screening tests, starting immediately?

So far, we haven't had any response from government authorities in this regard. We are waiting for an answer from them.

Question 11: Should professionals put themselves in voluntary isolation for 14 days and telecommute while receiving their salary?

Yes, absolutely. In accordance with ministry guidelines, Service Centres must not only encourage telecommuting, but must protect staff and students.

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Question 12: Are ministerial decrees still in effect?

All ministerial orders remain in effect for the time being. Professionals have no leeway to refuse a different assignment.

Question 13: What about professionals who work in several elementary schools?

At the moment, there is no restriction from the MEES or the public health authorities that restrict assignments. In its guidelines, the MEES mentions that staff assigned to several establishments will continue to provide services.

Note that this seems to be counter to the INSPQ guidelines with regard to daycare services, which provides clear restrictions prohibiting daycare employees from moving around between different establishments of one childcare centre. Employees should always work at the same establishment (see item 10 of the INSPQ document).

[French only] <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/covid/2984-travailleuses-services-garde-covid19.pdf>

the FPPE is aware of this significant issue and the risks posed to professionals who are assigned to several elementary schools, which is why the president of the Federation is putting this question directly to the Minister. We will be following up on this as soon as we receive a response from the Minister.

Contact your union if there is an issue.

Question 14: If there is no room in childcare services, how can I report for work?

The Ministry assures us that workers who are required in the workplace will have priority with regards to childcare services. In the event of a problem, we ask professionals to first report any childcare-related problems to their immediate superior and then to their union. If necessary, Service Centres must support telecommuting.

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Question 15: I am an elementary school professional with school-age children. Can I continue telecommuting if I want to keep my children at home?

You should explain the issue to your employer and make a request to continue telecommuting. Ultimately, your employer may however refuse this request and demand your presence in the workplace.

Question 16: What should a professional working in an elementary school with 17 students with behavioural problems, who require even greater proximity during times of crisis, do?

According to ministry guidelines, classrooms will contain a maximum of 15 students. In addition, the Service Centre must consider how much risk the clientele poses and provide professionals with the necessary protective equipment to safeguard their health. The two-metre rule must be followed; otherwise, the board must provide you with the required protective equipment: masks, gloves, visors, etc.

Question 17: What should professionals do if their work requires them to breach social distancing measures?

According to ministry guidelines, workers who are unable to adhere to social distancing measures are required to wear protection. We can therefore demand protective equipment such as nitrile gloves, face masks or visors, etc.

Question 18: Will employers provide professional staff with materials for disinfecting workplaces?

Yes. The Ministry is currently working with public health to determine the equipment required for reopening safely and is in contact with school boards to plan the procurement of required equipment.