



We know that this is a difficult time, full of uncertainty. The information you need to run your business changes rapidly, and it can be hard to keep track and make sense of it all.

In order to relieve some of the pressure on small businesses such as yours, we are gathering information you need about government services and supports in Ontario and putting it in this one document. We plan to update the community as more information becomes available.

Support for **businesses**

In its Spring Fiscal Update, the Ontario government announced the following measures to support small businesses:

- Provincial tax deferrals on the Employer Health Tax (EHT), Tobacco Tax, Fuel Tax, Beer Tax and Mining Tax and other provincially-administered taxes until August 31, 2020 with no interest or penalty
- WSIB premium deferrals until August 31, 2020 with no interest or penalty
- Business Education Property Tax deferrals for one payment quarter (90 days after June)
- Employer Health Tax (EHT) exemption threshold increased to \$1-million for the next year
- Property tax reassessments being conducted this year for the 2021 tax year have been postponed
- Provincial Land Tax Payments are deferred from their next due date for 90 days without interest or penalty.

The Ontario government also announced an end to Time-of-Use electricity pricing during the COVID-19 outbreak. Effective immediately, electricity will be priced at "low-peak" - 10.1 cents/kwh - at all hours of the day for the next 45 days.

Last week, the Government of Canada announced three new initiatives to help support Canadian businesses facing the impacts of COVID-19. The initiatives included:

- An enhanced wage subsidy program that allows qualified businesses and non-profit organizations seeing a drop of at least 30 per cent in revenue to qualify for a 75 per cent wage subsidy.
- Guaranteed loans of up to \$40,000 for small businesses, interest-free for the first year and under certain conditions, up to \$10,000 could be non-repayable.
- GST and HST payments, as well as duties and taxes owed on imports, will be deferred until June 2020.

Workers' Compensation

As part of its Spring Fiscal Update, the Ontario government deferred WSIB premium payments until August 31, 2020 with no interest or penalty. Stay tuned to the WSIB website for the latest updates.

The province has launched a toll-free line 1-888-444-3659 to provide support to Ontario businesses who have questions about the province's recent emergency order to close at-risk workplaces following recommendations by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy

To help employers keep and return workers to their payroll through the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, announced the new Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy on March 27, 2020. This would provide a 75-per-cent wage subsidy to eligible employers for up to 12 weeks, retroactive to March 15, 2020.

This wage subsidy aims to prevent further job losses, encourage employers to re-hire workers previously laid off as a result of COVID-19, and help better position Canadian companies and other employers to more easily resume normal operations following the crisis. While the Government has designed the proposed wage subsidy to provide generous and timely financial support to employers, it has done so with the expectation that employers will do their part by using the subsidy in a manner that supports the health and well-being of their employees. The usual treatment of tax credits and other benefits provided by the government would apply. As a consequence, the wage subsidy received by an employer would be considered government assistance and be included in the employer's taxable income.

Eligible Employers (CEWS)

Eligible employers would include individuals, taxable corporations, partnerships consisting of eligible employers, non-profit organizations and registered charities.

Public bodies would not be eligible for this subsidy. Public bodies would generally include municipalities and local governments, Crown corporations, wholly owned municipal corporations, public universities, colleges, schools and hospitals.

This subsidy would be available to eligible employers that see a drop of at least 15 per cent of their revenue in March 2020 and 30 per cent for the following months (see Eligible Periods). In applying for the subsidy, employers would be required to attest to the decline in revenue.

We encourage all eligible employers to rehire employees as quickly as possible and to apply for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy if they are eligible. To ensure that the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) applies as intended, the Government will consider implementing an approach to limit duplication. This could include a process to allow individuals rehired by their employer during the same eligibility period to cancel their CERB claim and repay that amount.



How to Apply (CEWS)

Eligible employers would be able to apply for the CEWS through the Canada Revenue Agency's My Business Account portal as well as a web-based application. Employers would have to keep records demonstrating their reduction in arm's-length revenues and remuneration paid to employees. More details about the application process will be made available shortly.

Support for *self-employed*

The government of Ontario has indicated that there will be supports for the self-employed; however, there are no details at this time.

Support for employees

If you need to lay off employees temporarily, there is no requirement to give or pay notice since the employee is not being terminated. In Ontario, employers have the option to temporarily lay off employees for up to 13 weeks. After 13 weeks, the lay off becomes permanent and severance pay rules will apply.

Ontario has extended job-protection for employees unable to work because:

- The employee is under medical investigation, supervision or treatment for COVID-19.
- The employee is acting in accordance with an order under the Health Protection and Promotion Act.
- The employee is in isolation or quarantine.
- The employee is acting in accordance with public health information or direction.
- The employer directs the employee not to work.
- The employee needs to provide care to a person for a reason related to COVID-19 such as a school or day-care closure.
- The protections are retroactive to January 25, 2020.

Ontario employers are also restricted from asking for doctor's notes for COVID-19 related leaves, including quarantine, self-isolation or childcare responsibilities due to COVID-19 related school and daycare closures.

Canadian Emergency Response Benefit

The CERB supports Canadians by providing financial support to employed and self-employed Canadians who are directly affected by COVID-19. It provides a payment of \$2,000 for a 4-week period (the same as \$500 a week) for up to 16 weeks. After you apply, you should get your payment in 3 business days if you signed up for direct deposit. If you haven't, you should get it in about 10 business days.



additional Resources

The Government of Canada is taking immediate, significant and decisive action to help Canadians facing hardship as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Additional information can be found at:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html#businesses>

Webinars explaining various techniques and tips on coping with the impacts of COVID-19 on your business:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWtYS2XwovM&feature=youtu.be>

Resources to Manage the Impact on Canadian Businesses:

<https://web.mentorworks.ca/wbn-2020-04-14-covid19>

Landscape Ontario, its partners and members have made a number of free webinars available to members of the landscape and horticulture profession as a way for business owners and employees to share information and support in order to survive the COVID-19 crisis:

<https://horttrades.com/upcoming-webinars-covid-19>

Questions?

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An orange speech bubble icon containing the text 'FAQ' in white capital letters.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: How can I **support** my favourite small business?

A: Now, more than ever, small businesses need our support.

Reach out and support your favourite small business and keep up-to-date on practical tips on how to make a difference.

Q: How can I ready my business to apply for Government financial support?

A: Right now, we know that government supports are coming to help business owners. We also know additional funding will be available through traditional lenders launching new financing options. What we don't know is the specifics, or how people will qualify for this support. That doesn't mean you can't prepare in advance. Start by creating a spreadsheet that documents your fixed and variable expenses, how many cancelled orders you've seen (and the dollar amount), insurance responses and the costs associated with your lease. You may be asked to provide these details, and this level of specificity will help the government refine who needs support and how it can best be deployed.

Q: I'm going to have to temporarily lay off employees. How do I handle it correctly?

A: While we encourage each employer to do everything in their power to avoid layoffs, we understand it can't be avoided in some cases. An article has been published on What Employers Need to Know About Temporary Layoffs that's been updated with information on Employment Insurance and COVID-19.

Q: Are there any alternatives to laying off employees?

A: Absolutely! The Government of Canada has put in place work sharing temporary special measures for employers affected by downturn in business due to COVID-19. These measures extend the duration of work sharing agreements by an additional 38 weeks, for a total of 76 weeks. The mandatory waiting period has also been waived.

Q: What are the details for the temporary wage subsidy?

A: The Government of Canada has announced a 75 per cent wage subsidy for qualifying businesses, for up to 3 months, retroactive to March 15, 2020. This will help businesses to keep and return workers to the payroll. More details on eligibility criteria will start with the impact of COVID-19 on sales, and will be shared before the end of the month.

Q: Where can I find out more about Employee Insurance and COVID-19?

A: Visit the Federal Government's dedicated Employment Insurance page to apply for EI benefits. Afterwards, you can apply to have the usual one-week waiting period waived by calling the government's toll-free number at 1-833-381-2725. If there's a need to lay off employees, ensure they're receiving a record of employment as they will need this to apply.

Q: What if I don't qualify for Employment Insurance?

A: The Government of Canada has announced the creation of an Emergency Response Benefit. Details on how the program will work:

They will provide a taxable benefit of \$2,000 a month for up to 4 months to:

- workers who must stop working due to COVID19 and do not have access to paid leave or other income support.
- workers who are sick, quarantined, or taking care of someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children that are sick or need additional care because of school and daycare closures.
- workers who still have their employment but are not being paid because there is currently not sufficient work and their employer has asked them not to come to work.
- wage earners and self-employed individuals, including contract workers, who would not otherwise be eligible for Employment Insurance.

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit will be accessible through a secure web portal starting in early April. Applicants will also be able to apply via an automated telephone line or via a toll-free number.

Q: How will COVID-19 affect import/exports and shipment of inventory?

A: Currently, there are restrictions on the import or exports. While borders are beginning to close for leisure travel, there is no indication whatsoever this will affect commercial transport. If your business relies on transport by air, be aware most passenger airlines are currently scaling back operations but cargo services are continuing as normal.

Q: How can I minimize my business costs as much as possible?

A: Speak to your service providers/landlords if payments are upcoming. They are keenly aware of the situation and there will likely be room for flexibility in payment terms. In some instances, this is already happening:

- In recent days, the Canadian Government has announced all taxpayers can defer, until after August 31, 2020, the payment of any income tax amounts that become owing on or after mid-March and before September 2020.
- The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) is also permitting lenders to allow payment deferral beginning immediately.
- Algoma Power has also announced measures to help those struggling to meet their utility bills.

Q: My staff are working remotely. What are some best practices?

A: For many businesses, COVID-19 has forced remote working on their team. Fortunately, it's easy to maintain productivity even while the team is separated. Employers should schedule regular morning meetings, be clear in expectations, make sure employees have what they need to perform their role safely, and be patient – this is a time of tremendous anxiety and turmoil for everyone.

Q: Where can I learn more about COVID-19 business resources?

A: As new resources and supports are announced, or further details emerge, we will be posting biweekly updates. Check in regularly to get the latest updates. Also, join us on the webinars listed above.



**COVID-19
BUSINESS RESOURCES**