

Restarting the Economy: What manufacturing workers need to know

June 8, 2020

More than 300,000 manufacturing workers lost their jobs or were put on temporary leave between February and April 2020. Most of these workers were put on leave due to pandemic related restrictions and many expect to return to their jobs once the pandemic subsides.

Not all employers responded to restrictions in the same way. Some employers, including food manufacturing, and agri-business, remained open while others made the choice to shutter their facilities temporarily due to several factors including a decline in the demand for goods, supply chain constraints, and efforts to limit the risk of outbreak. Some workplaces were able to pivot to manufacturing personal protective equipment (PPE) and other COVID-19 related medical devices. Unifor members are currently making ventilators, masks, face shields, and medical gowns.

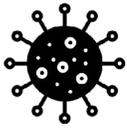
Parts of the manufacturing sector are slowly coming back on-line. Employers that closed have announced gradual restarts and many facilities are in the first phase of re-opening, including in the auto, shipbuilding, and parts of the aerospace sectors. In other cases, a lag in declining demand is only now causing disruptions with production schedules, triggering a second wave of layoffs. Employers that remained open have done so with tremendous effort to redesign health and safety protocols.

Under every scenario, employers must set the conditions that keep workers safe from the spread of the coronavirus.

What manufacturing workers can expect when returning to work

The manufacturing sector will re-open gradually. Workplaces with multiple production shifts may recall one shift at a time. Some workplaces plan to keep as many people employed as possible by implementing a system of rotating shifts and layoffs. Global supply chains have been disrupted but borders remain open for essential business travel and trade.

Reopening in a healthy and safe manner must be accomplished through a variety of control measures ranging from engineering controls such as increased ventilation or plexiglass barriers to administrative controls such as physical distancing. When all other controls have been exhausted, the use of appropriate personal



protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves, and eye protection must be adopted. Failure to use appropriate controls can lead to large COVID-19 outbreaks.

Workers should expect to see a substantial redesign of the flow of goods and people through all manufacturing facilities. Unifor has worked closely with many of our employers to help create health and safety protocols that consider everything from organized entry into the building to physical distancing reminders and break time rules. These measures, when followed properly, will protect worker health and safety and business continuity.

What manufacturing workers should expect from their employers

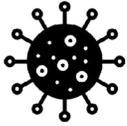
Workers should expect substantive communication from their employers prior to returning to work. Communication should include training and instruction covering everything from screening procedures prior to entering the facility, physical distancing measures, procedures for detecting the virus, and information on what to expect inside the plant. Key expectations include:

- Establishing and communicating return to work protocols; workers must be trained extensively on any new health and safety protocols;
- Developing directives for physical distancing whenever possible, including entry and exit while on breaks and lunch. Many facilities have closed cafeterias and limited the use of microwaves.
- Ensuring access to appropriate PPE and regular sanitizing of work tools and machines;
- Ensuring facilities have been cleaned and sanitized, hot water and air chilling systems have been flushed and appropriate engineering controls have been put in place;
- Ensuring workers are able to access a job-protected leave if they are not able to immediately return to work due to child, elder and other dependent care needs related to the pandemic; ensuring their service and seniority continue to accrue and they continue to be covered by pension and benefit plans during their leave as required by law.

What manufacturing workers need from government

Governments play an important role in the income security of workers in the manufacturing sector. Decisions around international trade in goods and services also has an extensive effect on this industry. Governments must put workers front and center in all decisions they make. Unifor's recommendations include:

- Ensuring the income security system remains agile to meet the needs of all workers in transitory times. Employment Insurance, the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and the Canada Emergency Response Benefit must ensure workers receive full income replacement, regardless of their individual return to work schedule;
- Ensuring that workers receive all of the income support payments they are entitled to, and have bargained in their collective agreements, including access to Supplemental Unemployment Benefit (SUB) plans;



COVID-19 FLATTEN THE CURVE



- Making every effort to safely keep the border open to essential workers, business travel and international trade;
- Ensuring adequate funding for sufficient childcare capacity and synchronizing business opening with the reopening of childcare facilities.

Lear Corporation Story

Lear's Safe Work Playbook is a leading example of how to focus on health and safety in the coronavirus era. The company quickly developed robust health and safety protocols, made them public and has served as a guidepost for other facilities as they come back online - demonstrating that mitigation and successful return to work can be accomplished hand in hand.

Lear's Safe Work Playbook can be found at: <https://lear.com/safeworkplaybook>

Additional Resources

Unifor has launched a hub for member information about the pandemic at unifor.org/COVID19 and encourages members to check the site regularly for updates.

Subscribe to Unilink, the union's weekly national newsletter at unifor.org/subscribe and download the Unifor mobile app on your smartphone.