

How is MTS advocating for members at this time?

MTS is advocating—both behind the scenes with Manitoba Education and education partners and publicly through every channel available—for the safety of the membership and a sustainable return to in-class learning. We stand firm in our position that the government and employers must provide all means of securing that safety and sustainability, through measures that include access to Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs), N-95 masks, improved ventilation as well as protection from excessive and unreasonable workload.

MTS has also argued that staffing levels, already strained before the onset of the more easily transmissible Omicron variant, could reach the breaking point once in-person learning reconvenes on January 17. We continue to explore strategies to alleviate this pressure on the system.

Deep concerns remain and fuel our advocacy related to workload, management of staff shortages, duplex and blending teaching, case management and notification, and student absenteeism.

I'm worried about staying home when I am sick or needing to isolate because it puts extra work on my colleagues. What should I do?

Public Health Orders (PHOs) are clear on this—stay at home if you are sick or isolating. Your colleagues can connect with MTS regarding their workload concerns, but perceived or real pressure to work while sick is not acceptable and should not prevent you from following PHOs to stay home when you are ill or isolating.

What happens if staff members are sick, and I'm asked to cover classes or take on extra work?

You should document any extra work assigned to you outside of your usual assignment. A template form can be found [here](#). Once you have documented multiple instances of extra workload, consult with an MTS Teacher Welfare (TW) staff officer.

Are sick notes required for COVID and non-COVID illnesses?

Staff members who are away sick or who are self-isolating must follow the school's human resources policy and collective agreement provisions. During the pandemic, medical notes have not normally been required for staff who have COVID-19 or flu-related symptoms, or those who are caring for individuals in this situation. If your employer asks for a medical note, please contact a TW staff officer for assistance.

Will the number of family medical days be extended beyond the Collective Agreements (CAs)?

Many locals have sought an extension to the use of sick leave for the purpose of family medical. If you have exhausted all of your family medical leave and need more time due to illness in your household, please contact a TW staff officer for advice.

How do I know if the air quality in my classroom is at the appropriate level?

MTS has publicly advocated for enhanced air quality in schools, particularly given outbreaks of the more easily transmissible Omicron variant. This includes calls for upgrades to school ventilation. Connect with your principal to find out more about air quality assessment in your school. Your school's WS&H committee may have additional information as well.

Will divisions allow immunocompromised members to work from home?

School divisions have been dealing with these situations on a case-by-case basis. Some divisions have said "no" to working from home. Working from home is working and should be treated the same as being in person at school. An accommodation based on medical or family status may also be pursued with the assistance of a TW staff officer.

Teachers should not be working from home while accessing sick leave or any other type of leave.

Can I invoke the right to refuse dangerous work?

The right to refuse dangerous work depends on specific circumstances and it is closely linked to whether mandated protocols and reasonable controls are being implemented to mitigate potential dangers. Being in a pandemic does not automatically mean work is dangerous and the threshold to invoke this right is very high.

Teacher welfare staff officers are well versed on the legislation governing this process, legal advice on if/when a teacher would be justified in invoking their right to refuse dangerous work, and nuances of the language (for example, the difference between 'danger' and 'risk').

When teachers contact MTS about this type of concern, they are provided with the information on the work refusal process. We do not advise them to proceed or not proceed with a work refusal, as it is an individual decision. Staff officers may also suggest other steps that can be taken.

If you have questions about the right to refuse, connect with the MTS Teacher Welfare Department, and a staff officer will advise on your specific circumstances. To reach an MTS staff officer, call 204-831-3055, or toll free: 1-800-262-8803.

I am reading about teachers who want to stage a collective work refusal.

Can I participate?

A collective response (for example, walk out or mass work refusal) is not an option as it would be considered job action and could subject the local association and/or Society to legal action by the employer/province. We have different levers and mechanisms to respond including grievance action.

There's a lot of confusion about mask safety. What do I need to know?

Effective January 4, 2022, all teachers and staff, including substitute staff, are required to wear medical-grade masks while indoors. Medical-grade disposable masks have been issued to all schools. While staff may choose to bring their own KN95 or N95 mask and are permitted to use these as an alternative, staff must be aware that the quality of the mask cannot be assured as they have not been assessed. This is in contrast to the medical masks that are being supplied by the province. Eye protection may also be used in those situations where staff determine they are at higher risk for COVID-19 or when physical distancing is difficult to achieve.

Masks and personal protective equipment will be available to schools for use. More information is available [here](#).

MTS continues to advocate specifically for N95 masks for teachers out of an abundance of caution, in recognition of the difficulty maintaining physical distancing and the nature of the confined and congregate spaces in which educators work.

The provincial government claims it has spent \$63 million on making schools safe during the pandemic. Where did the money go, and what was it spent on?

MTS has made a request under The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) asking the government to release a full accounting of the \$63 million, including who received funds and the purpose for which the funds were provided. We await a response and will report on the findings.

I've been under prolonged stress and my mental health is suffering.

How can MTS help?

The Member & Family Assistance Program (MFAP) offered through HumanaCare includes 24/7 access to counselling and a variety of other supportive services and resources.

Please click [here](#), or call 1-800 661-8193 at any time to access counselling support and to set up an account to access a portal of resources.

Remember, MTS is here for you and ready to advise if you have any questions about working conditions, safety, mental health and more.

If you have questions, connect with your local association president.

You can also contact the MTS Teacher Welfare Department, and a staff officer will advise on your circumstances. **To reach an MTS staff officer, call 204-831-3055, or toll free: 1-800-262-8803.**

Where can I find new and important information?

COVID-19 Education Plan (all topics) (communication, public health measures, school operations, case management, mental health and well-being, student learning and achievement)

Public Health Measures for K to 12 Schools (guidelines for staying home, physical distancing, masks, bus transportation, extra measures, extra-curricular activities, improved ventilation, vaccinations, expanded testing, case management and notification)

School Measures for Restricted and Critical Levels – Manitoba Pandemic Response System (distancing/cohorts, masks, sports/extracurricular activities)

Toolkit for Notification in Schools (isolation and testing requirements, notification, cases in schools process steps, resources for parents and caregivers, community notification letter, RAT test program, moving to remote learning)

Masks and Personal Protective Equipment (requirements and guidelines)

Standards for Remote Learning (scenarios, standards, and expectations)