

**PROTECTING OUR
PSYCHOLOGICAL
HEALTH:
IT'S OUR RIGHT**



www.aptsq.com
info@aptsq.com

What is your employer required to do to protect your psychological health?	4
What can your employer do to support psychological health in the workplace?	4
What does the APTS do?	5
Take care of yourself - it's important	5

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

For the OHS-SD sector, the psychological health of workers in the healthcare system is currently a top priority. These workers have been facing a difficult situation for several years and COVID-19 has now made it worse, creating fear, worry and anxiety at the professional and personal levels.

As health workers, you are directly exposed to moments of stress, anxiety and depression. A number of experts¹ have shared their concerns about the impact of the pandemic on psychological health. The APTS has listened to members and made observations in the field, and it is very clear that our members have suffered and are still suffering from the repercussions of the first wave.

It is crucial that your employer be concerned about the effects of psychological distress on mental health. Proactively, the employer must adopt measures to limit the psychosocial risks – distress and negative psychological consequences – associated with the pandemic.

Psychosocial risks arise from the organization of work, management practices, employment conditions, and relations with colleagues and immediate supervisors. They heighten the probability of harmful effects on the physical and psychological health of people exposed to them.²



Here are some questions that will help you assess whether there are psychosocial risks in your work environment:

Has your workload increased?

Are you under pressure to complete work that has not been done?

Is there a shortage of personnel in your sector?

Do you have the feeling you are not doing a good job?

Have you experienced emotional trauma? (For instance, have you been faced with death in the performance of your duties?)

Have you been afraid of being infected or infecting your loved ones?

Do you feel you are not getting support from the head of your department or your colleagues?

If you answered Yes to several of these questions, there is a high risk that your physical and psychological health is under threat.

¹ <https://www.irsst.qc.ca/covid-19/avis-irsst/id/2664/prevenir-la-detresse-psychologique-chez-le-personnel-du-reseau-de-la-sante-et-des-services-sociaux>

² INSPQ, 2016 - <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/risques-psychosociaux-du-travail-et-promotion-de-la-sante-des-travailleurs/risques-psychosociaux-du-travail> (in French)

WHAT IS YOUR EMPLOYER REQUIRED TO DO TO PROTECT YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH?

Your employer is obliged to protect employees' health and safety, and this includes protecting both their physical and their psychological health.

Employers must:

- give employees information about risks related to their work, including those related to COVID-19;
- provide employees with the appropriate training, assistance and supervision to ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need to safely perform the work assigned to them;
- adopt methods and techniques designed to identify, control and eliminate risks to employees' physical and psychological health.³

The current situation has changed employees' usual working conditions, and in this context, your employer is required to pay attention to psychosocial risks in order to prevent or reduce the pandemic's negative impact on your psychological health. The INSPQ (Québec's public health institute) advises employers to pay attention to risk factors and take preventive action as soon as possible to mitigate their effects on employees' psychological and physical health. These effects can include mental health disorders, musculoskeletal problems, cardiovascular disease, and work-related accidents.⁴

WHAT CAN YOUR EMPLOYER DO TO SUPPORT PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE?

- While complying with physical distancing measures, or by using technology, ensure there are moments when workers can get together, express themselves, support each other, and consider ways of meeting the challenges they face.
- Give workers the tools and means they need to do their job properly in a safe and satisfying way, such as equipment to work from home, personal protective equipment, and clear procedures to follow if they have symptoms.
- Encourage workers to take their scheduled breaks and lunch periods.
- Provide daily recognition for workers and teams, with a focus on each person's efforts and work.
- Consult workers on decisions affecting their work.
- Facilitate exchanges between workers and their immediate supervisors by establishing means of communication such as regular team meetings or electronic interactions.
- Communicate regularly and clearly about the work to be done and how to do it.
- Listen to workers' concerns and suggestions and respond to them as quickly as possible.
- Pay attention to work-life balance issues (childcare, working from home).⁵

³ <http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/S-2.1>

⁴ <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2988-reduction-PSF-covid19.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2988-reduction-PSF-covid19.pdf>

WHAT DOES THE APTS DO?

The APTS proactively participates in research projects, and it denounces the situation in exchanges with actors such as the CNESST and MSSS who have the power to adopt preventive measures to protect psychological health in the workplace.

The OHS-SD sector also supports local teams taking steps to get employers to protect workers' psychological health.

Don't hesitate to contact your union team for support and answers to your questions.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF – IT'S IMPORTANT

As the pandemic disrupts our personal and professional lives, it's normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, afraid, and worried. We all react differently and have our own resources and abilities to help us adapt. Taking care of yourself is essential during this difficult time. Here are some of the things you can do:

- Keep up or adopt healthy habits in your everyday life: eat well, move, go outside, get enough sleep.⁶
- Keep in touch with people who make you feel good, and share what you're experiencing.
- Make time for yourself : time for reading, being creative, or relaxing.⁷

⁶ <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/49753.html>

⁷ <https://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/coronavirus-covid-19-conseils-psychologiques-et-informations-au-grand-public> (in French)



What are the signs indicating that you should see a health-care professional?

You may have reached the end of your resources. If you observe the following symptoms, and they persist, it's important to seek the advice of a health-care professional who will assess your situation and provide help.

Deep fatigue; irritability; aggressivity; inability to concentrate; difficulty in coping with responsibilities or taking care of yourself or your family; significant changes in behaviour or habits; sleep disorders, suicidal ideas, anxiety, panic attacks, hypervigilance, feelings of depression, exhaustion, compassion fatigue.⁸

Depending on the health-care professional's assessment, these symptoms may be associated with one of the following mental health problems.

Anxiety disorder

Anxiety disorder can manifest itself when you anticipate a threatening or unfortunate event. We each experience different degrees of anxiety, and how you perceive an event will have a strong impact on the intensity of your experience.

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder may develop when a person is exposed to a traumatic event in which they directly face death (for instance, the death of a CHSLD patient under adverse conditions), or experience fear of death or a threat to their physical integrity or someone else's. The event is sudden, intense, unpredictable, and uncontrollable.⁹

See our Web capsule for more information on post-traumatic stress disorder.

Where can I get help?

Call

- your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Info-Social 811, a free, confidential telephone service that will quickly put you in touch with a psychosocial intervention professional
- the suicide help line at 1-866-277-3553 (1-866-APPELLE)



Useful references:

<https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/salle-de-presse/covid-19-info-en/Documents/DC100-2146A-Guide.pdf>

<https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2988-reduction-PSF-covid19.pdf>

⁸ Based on <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2988-reduction-PSF-covid19.pdf> and <https://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/trousse-clinique-pour-depistage-et-intervention-en-situation-de-crise-pandemie-covid-19-> (in French)

⁹ <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/mental-health-mental-illness/post-traumatic-stress-disorder>