

FAQs for Employees Returning to Work in Fort McMurray

Updated: June 15, 2016

Ongoing efforts continue to support the re-entry of residents into Fort McMurray, including the phased reactivation of the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre (NLRHC) and other AHS services.

Contact has been made or attempted for all Fort McMurray staff. Most recently, we have been in touch with staff in relation to the reactivation of services - all employees were contacted in phases starting June 3, 2016 and provided with a 'return to work' date. Employees are asked to report to work on their designated 'return to work' date. Income continuance will cease as of the 'return to work' date.

Our main goal is to get our Fort McMurray staff back to work in a safe and productive way in order to get health services operating at full capacity. We understand there are various scenarios that may impact some employee's ability to return to work. It is important for AHS to understand these circumstances so we can best plan the staffing for health services in the community. Requests for leave will be reviewed based on individual circumstances and operational requirements. In addition, it will be important for staff to understand the supports available to help their return to work.

The following are questions we can answer at this time.

Q1. How was my return to work date determined?

A1. As of June 7, it is expected that most staff will be back in Fort McMurray and available for work. Each employee's precise 'return to work' date will be around this time.

'Return to work' dates were dictated by the phased plans to reactivate AHS services and facilities in Fort McMurray. These plans were dependent on the recovery and cleaning efforts to ensure the facilities are safe. The first phase is reopening of the Emergency Department at the NLRHC. Services for Diagnostic Imaging, Lab and Environmental Services are also required in order to re-open.

Staff may be contacted about working temporarily in an area other than their normal unit/service. This will be done through the phased re-opening of the hospital, respecting the skills, knowledge, and with appropriate orientation of staff.

Q2. How will compensation be handled?

A2. In general, staff will be supported by income continuance until their scheduled 'return to work' date.

We expect there to be a variety of scenarios depending on individual circumstances. If there are situations where staff cannot return to Fort McMurray for various reasons, they may request time off from their manager through regular approval processes and access their available banks (vacation, personal leave, special leave, stat banks, unpaid LOA, medical leave).

Q3. Where can I get information about housing in Fort McMurray?

A3. Resources for available rental listings are on the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo website (<http://www.rmwb.ca>). Employees can also access www.emergency.alberta.ca for housing resources.

As of June 15, the Canadian Red Cross Emergency Lodging Assistance Program has concluded. It is expected that employees have been able to make arrangements to transition to longer-term housing support.

Q4. Will AHS be providing temporary lodging in order for me to return to work if I don't have temporary or permanent housing?

A4. For employees with extenuating circumstances, who have been unable to secure longer term housing, AHS will support lodging up until **June 30, 2016**. If you require this support, please reach out thorough the nz.staffcheckin@ahs.ca, or discuss with your manager.

If employees are unable to secure temporary housing support, AHS will arrange temporary accommodations for **the employee** (not family members, pets, etc), **for the employee's shift cycle**, and provide transportation from Edmonton or Calgary to Fort McMurray and back if needed.

Q5. I have been called back to work, but need to take some time off to take care of some personal matters related to the disaster. How will this be paid?

A5. Our main goal is to get our Fort McMurray staff back to work in a safe and productive way in order to get health services back up and running as soon as possible. However, we understand that some employees may require time off to attend to personal matters associated with the fire. All requests for time off or delays in returning to work will be handled through the regular approval processes on a case by case basis. Decisions around granting time off will be made based on individual circumstances and operational requirements. Employees will be required to access their available banks (vacation, personal leave, stat/overtime banks, unpaid LOA).

Q6. I have been called back to work but require time off to deal with childcare issues. How will this be paid?

A6. We understand that childcare may be an issue for some staff upon return to the community. Requests for time off or delays in returning to work will be handled through regular approval processes on a case by case basis. Decisions around granting time off will be made based on individual circumstances and operational requirements and employees will be required to access their available banks (vacation, personal leave, stat/overtime banks, unpaid LOA).

Q7. I have been called back to work but my child is enrolled in a school outside of Fort McMurray and I would like to keep him in for the duration of the school year. Will I continue to be paid until I return?

A7. Employees in the above situation will have to speak with their manager and may be eligible for time off based on individual circumstances and operational requirements using their available banks.

Q8. I have not yet been called back to work as my unit/area is not yet open and there is no other work for me. Will I continue to be paid until I am called back to work?

A8. Yes, your income continuance will continue until you are called back to work.

Q9. I do not want to return to Fort McMurray. Will AHS help to find me alternate employment within the organization?

A9. Employees who are not planning on returning to Fort McMurray should be advising their managers of this as soon as possible so that next steps can be discussed.

Q10. Am I able to work remotely if I don't have temporary or permanent housing in Fort McMurray right now?

A10. If you are currently residing *outside* of the province during the closure of health services, you will not be permitted to work remotely from your temporary out of province residence. This is due to the differences in legislation between provinces including OHS, WCB and Employment Standards.

Those who are currently residing *within* the province of Alberta should contact their manager to request to work remotely. Requests will be considered individually based on logistical requirements, systems access and operational needs. Those working remotely must adhere to all relevant AHS policies including the following:

[Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#)

[Guidelines for Safeguarding Information](#)

Employees are reminded that these arrangements can be ended at any point in time by management and in accordance with the collective agreement if applicable.

Q11. I have returned to Fort McMurray and my unit is not open yet. Can I be redeployed to another unit until my home unit has reopened?

A11. Staff may be contacted about working temporarily in an area other than their normal unit/service through the phased re-opening of the hospital, respecting their skills and knowledge, and with appropriate orientation.

Q12. I have been called back to work but the day I am supposed to be there is a day I already have scheduled for vacation, is the employer cancelling my vacation?

A12. You should discuss this with your manager to determine whether your return to work can be delayed or whether the vacation needs to be rescheduled as per applicable collective agreement processes and provisions.

Q13. I have been called back to work but I am unable to return to work due to medical reasons. Can I take some more time before I return to work?

A13. You should talk to your manager about your needs. You may be eligible for time off, using appropriate coding, based on your personal circumstances.

Q14. What if I am ill or injured and do not have enough sick time in my banks to cover the anticipated leave?

A14. Employees should contact their manager to advise them of the absence and length of time they will be away. Their manager will refer them to Abilities Management if they are concerned about not having enough sick time in their banks and are not able to return to work for medical reasons. If the employee is eligible for Disability Benefits, they may apply for STD or LTD right away so that there is not a prolonged gap before their salary is replaced.

EMPLOYEE SUPPORTS

Q15. What other supports are available to me right now?

A15. Upon return to worksites, there will be additional supports and resources available to staff including, but not limited to, health and wellness resources, education sessions and HR support. Information regarding these supports will be communicated to employees.

The Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is also available to support you and your family through this challenging time. The EFAP can be contacted 24/7 online or by phone at 1-877-273-3134.

Below is the process for contacting EFAP:

- Call the EFAP line at 1-877-273-3134
- Let them know if you have been personally impacted by the Fort McMurray wildfires.
- Morneau Shepell will augment its intake process so that you will be put on an expedited path to counseling and appointments for further follow up if necessary.
- If possible, please be ready to talk about what you may be looking for in terms of services and support. For example, you may not want trauma support, but you may want to know where you can take your children while you attend to the cleaning of your home or property.
- If you're not sure, call them and ask. They are there to help.

Q16. What are some of the supports available through my union or professional association?

A16. Employees are encouraged to contact their union and professional associations to obtain information about what other supports are available during this time.

Q17. Where can I find out more about re-entry into Fort McMurray?

Q17. More information about re-entry into Fort McMurray including resources and supports can be found in the Government of Alberta Re-Entry Information Booklet:

<http://asset.rmwb.ca/files/RMWB-Re-Entry%20Information-Booklet.pdf>.

COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENTS OF RE-ENTRY

Q18. I am currently residing out of province and I have been called back to work. Will AHS pay to fly me back to return to work?

A18. AHS employees who evacuated to various locations across Alberta or to other provinces are responsible for their travel costs back to Fort McMurray. Employees are encouraged to contact their personal insurance companies for information about cost recovery during a disaster.

Q19. I was part of the group of AHS staff who evacuated with patients -will AHS pay to return me to Fort McMurray?

A19. Employees should consult with their manager. Expense reimbursement will be assessed on a case by case basis.