

Contract Security Agencies and the Novel Corona Virus (Covid-19)

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The novel corona virus (Covid-19) poses a special threat to those who provide frontline contract security services as does any major viral threat. Security guards are exposed to large numbers of people in their work and this increases the at risk potential for both parties.

As well, considering the majority of contract security guards fall within not more than 18% above the minimum wage remuneration rate and lack legislated paid sick day benefits in Ontario; this puts the contract agency, the guard and client at additional risk.

The agency risk is having an employee who finds themselves working under additional personal stress of the possibility of becoming ill, thoughts of not providing for their family, and should the employee out of personal necessity decide to work despite illness, they have a guard who may not be able to deliver the level of service required coupled with the possible liability of having their guard infecting others at the client workplace.

For the guard, this simply equates to, if the guard does not work, they do not get paid and therefore may not be able to pay rent, buy food or both. Therefore, despite how ill the guard may feel, the probability is high the guard may attend work despite illness, out of human necessity. There are also many other personal mental health issues that may or may not be present should this situation occur and to enumerate them is beyond the scope of this awareness article. However, as an employer, the mental health of all employees must be an active component of any workplace health, safety & wellness plan.

For the client, this means not having the contracted level of service efficiently provided, and the increased risk of others being infected in their workplace.

There is no clear cut single solution for many contract agencies in dealing with this. However, here is my “action item list” on how you can manage some aspects of this risk.

AWARENESS & EDUCATION

Employers must provide the awareness and education their guards need to be safe on the job. In order to do this, it is imperative employers themselves are fully aware of the viral risk. There is a free 2 hour online course available from Alison at <https://alison.com/course/coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know?> This course is very informative and you get a completion certificate once you pass the course test. However, be warned as this is a free course, it is sponsored and you will have to navigate through some adverts in lieu of paying tuition.

Specific Awareness & Education Action Items are:

- instructing guards on proper handwashing procedures and informing them frequent handwashing and using hand sanitizer is their immediate first line of defense.
- instructing guards on coughing/sneezing into a disposable tissue and immediately discarding it in a rubbish bin and not in their pocket. If they do not have a tissue, they should cough/sneeze in their elbow, not in their hand as they may inhale or place germs from their hand or contact germs of others they may have picked up on their hand in their mouth region.
- instruct guards of the signs/symptoms of the novel corona virus (Covid-19) so they may have an indicator if they or someone else may be infected.
- instruct guards that do patrols and touch multiple doorknobs, doors, guardrails, etc., to wear washable work gloves to provide a barrier between themselves and high contaminated surfaces. Of course, gloved hands must never touch the face (nose, eyes, mouth). When gloves are removed, hands must be washed asap, and gloves washed at least weekly.

- hands should never touch the face (eyes, mouth, nose) unless washed first.
- food must not be eaten unless hands are washed.
- communal or public accessible pens or keys should only be handled with work gloves on or hands should be washed immediately after use.
- work surfaces (desks, etc.) and telephones should be cleaned at least once each shift with a disinfectant wipe or isopropyl alcohol wipes.
- should the guard feel ill, they should be instructed to seek medical attention and not attend work.

EMPLOYER RISK MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

As an employer there are certain actionable items that can be done to better manage the risk posed by the novel corona virus (Covid-19).

Specific Employer Action Items are:

- ensure all supervisors and managers are aware of the risk and how to manage the risks associated with novel corona virus (Covid-19).
- provide all guards with a printed information sheet on novel corona virus (Covid-19) that addresses awareness items as mentioned previously and have supervisors/managers review these with the guards.



- consider offering guards not covered by paid sick day benefits, the flexibility of tapping into their accrued vacation pay to help cover lost wages in the event of confirmed illness, so they may be able to continue to financially provide for themselves and family; thus alleviating any further financial or mental health stress to the employee.

IMPORTANT – This would have to be done by pre-mutual written agreement between individual employee and employer.

As I am not an HR or Employment law specialist, further information and guidance would be required from a professional. I am merely putting this up for consideration, in the interest of the mental health of the employee with minimal resource allocation of the employer.

In this brief article I have attempted to provide some points for consideration during the current uncertain state of the novel corona virus (Covid-19) globally and specifically within the contract security industry. The goal is simply to get people talking and thinking about this from a practical, close to home mentality.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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