

#### RELATED TERMS

- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
- Infectious Disease Outbreaks



## Lessons Learned Information Sharing

www.LLIS.gov

#### PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Public Health
- Medical Care
- Emergency Management

## LESSON LEARNED

### Quarantine and Isolation: Ensuring Employment Security for Quarantined Populations

#### SUMMARY

Public health intervention measures such as quarantine and isolation may threaten an individual's employment status by requiring the employee to be absent from work. During the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus outbreak in Toronto, Canada, the provincial government of Ontario passed legislation that protected the jobs of quarantined and isolated individuals on SARS-related leave.

#### DESCRIPTION

Public health officials in Toronto, Canada quarantined close to 30,000 people in response to the 2003 SARS outbreak. Quarantine measures were designed to separate individuals who had potentially come into contact with the disease from those who had not. Public health officials isolated a much smaller number of individuals who had already contracted SARS in hospitals, homes, or other designated facilities. The widespread application of these measures, particularly quarantine, forced many Toronto residents to take an emergency leave of absence from their places of employment. At the time of the outbreak, however, there were no provincial laws requiring Ontario employers to grant employees emergency leave for public health reasons. The Ontario Employment Standards Act of 2000 only guaranteed ten days of emergency leave, which only applied to employees of larger companies.

The Ontario Legislature unanimously passed the SARS Assistance and Recovery Strategy Act of 2003 on April 30, 2003. The Act amended the Employment Standards Act of 2000 by granting any employee the right to take an unpaid "SARS emergency leave," if needed, as a supplement to the ten days of emergency leave already allowed in the Employment Standards Act. The SARS emergency leave applied retroactively to the start of the outbreak on March 26, 2003. This leave could be claimed by any employee who was under medical investigation, treatment or supervision related to SARS; under quarantine or isolation order; sent home by an employer because of suspicion of SARS; or providing care or assistance to a family member for a SARS-related concern. The Act also forbade any employer from firing an employee on SARS emergency leave unless the dismissal was proved necessary by the employer's SARS-related downsizing.

The SARS Assistance and Recovery Strategy Act of 2003 guaranteed Ontario residents an emergency leave of absence for SARS causes and safeguarded their jobs during this period. It mitigated the disruptive effects of quarantine measures on individual lives and sought to further boost confidence in and compliance with quarantine and isolation orders.

**CITATION**

Statute of Ontario 2003, c. 1. 37<sup>th</sup> Legislature, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, 30 Apr 2003. *SARS Assistance and Recovery Strategy Act of 2003*.

[http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/03s01\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/03s01_e.htm)

University of Louisville School of Medicine. *Quarantine and Isolation: Lessons Learned from SARS: A Report to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. 01 Nov 2003.

[https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content\\_id=9189](https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=9189)

**DISCLAIMER**

*Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email [Feedback@llis.dhs.gov](mailto:Feedback@llis.dhs.gov) or visit [www.llis.gov](http://www.llis.gov).