

# Temporary leave for physicians

## **A guide for physicians**

May 2025



# Temporary leave for physicians

Life's unpredictability means that even the most dedicated physician may need to step away from their medical practice for a time. A leave of absence can arise due to various personal, professional, or health-related circumstances.

## Preparing for your leave

### 1. Evaluate the situation

- Determine your leave duration and your intended involvement level during the absence.
- Review your business, financial and regulatory obligations, e.g. after-hours scheduling, cost sharing/operational expense agreements.
- *Health-related leave:* Consult your health-care provider about your work options. Consider having a contingency plan in case your return is delayed due to ongoing illness.

### 2. Review your financial situation

- Establish a financial plan to ensure peace of mind during your leave.
- You may qualify for [employment insurance](#), [parental leave benefits](#) or insurance payments (e.g., professional liability, critical illness, disability) depending on your circumstances.
- Consult your financial advisor for tailored guidance.

■ [EI sickness benefit](#)

■ [OMA Pregnancy and Parental Leave Resource](#)

■ [CPP disability benefit](#)

■ [Family Planning for Doctors](#)



### 3. Leave plan

- Share your intentions, leave duration, and absence plan with your group or employer, and staff.

#### Legal disclaimer

The information in this booklet has been made available for informational and educational purposes only and does not replace independent legal advice. These resources contain the views and opinions of the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) regarding the interpretation of the College of Physician and Surgeons (CPSO) Policies and Ministry of Health (MOH) regulations. Members are advised that the ultimate authority in matters of interpretation are in the purview of CPSO and MOH. The OMA assumes no responsibility for any discrepancies or differences of interpretation, any applicable law, or regulation with the Government of Ontario including but not limited to the MOH and the CPSO.

## 4. Patient care during leave

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario requires physicians to maintain continuity of care during temporary absences, including vacations, parental leave, or unplanned events like illness. You **must**:

- Arrange specific coverage arrangements with another healthcare provider(s) to manage patient care and all outstanding test results and consultation reports are received, reviewed, and acted upon if immediate intervention is required.
- Have a plan or coverage arrangement that allows other health-care providers to communicate or request information pertaining to patients under their care during temporary absences from practice.
- Make reasonable efforts to arrange for another health-care provider(s) to provide care to patients during planned temporary absences from practice.
- Communicate coverage arrangements to patients.
  - i. If specific arrangements are made, physicians must inform patients of these arrangements
  - ii. If after reasonable efforts are made it is not possible to make specific arrangements, physicians must inform patients seeking care during the temporary absence about appropriate alternative access points of care (e.g., Telehealth, local walk-in clinics, emergency department, etc.)

■ **CPMPA Continuity of care: Helping patients avoid falling through the cracks**

■ **OMA Continuity of care information**

- **See Appendix A for a transition checklist.**



### **IMPORTANT:**

Review **CPSO's Availability and Coverage Guideline** to understand your professional obligations.

### To find coverage:

- Ask other physicians in your group practice, if applicable.
- Ask colleagues if they or someone they know can provide coverage.
- Find a locum:
  - o Healthforce Ontario – Ontario Health’s job board for health-care providers
  - o Book Jane
  - o Family Physician Job Opportunities - Ontario Facebook group
  - o Medical school job boards
- [Resources for finding and hiring a locum. This link includes a contract guide and MOH requirements.](#)

### What happens if you can’t find coverage?

Reasonable efforts must be made to arrange coverage during planned absences.

What is reasonable will depend on: the length of the leave, the needs of your patients, and the resources available in the community.

You **must** inform patients about alternative access points of care if you are unable to arrange coverage.

- [See Appendix B for template letters to patients.](#)

## 5. Prepare your clinic

### Office Management

- Ensure your points of communication with patients, such as phone or secure messaging provide information relating to temporary coverage arrangements and points of care (e.g. telehealth walk-in clinics, emergency department, coverage arrangements that have been made, etc.).
- Delegate responsibilities to your employees to oversee daily operations and handle patient inquiries during your absence, including directing patients to alternative access points of care. Clearly communicate expectations and ensure they have the necessary tools and training.
- Empower your staff to address any potential unexpected event that may arise and specify your availability and the parameters, to minimize unnecessary contact during your leave.

## Staff

You can use this time for staff training and/or office efficient process improvements.

It is **imperative** to discuss any changes to your employees' role or employment status (e.g. reduced hours, temporary lay-off), with your legal counsel to ensure it abides with the [Ontario's Employment Standards Act](#) and any contractual obligations you may have under their employment contracts.

Generally, it is not possible to temporarily lay-off employees without specific contractual language within a valid employment contract. Similarly, employment contracts must specifically permit reducing hours or altering working conditions or there is a risk of constructive dismissal. While employers can require employees to take vacation at specific times, such as during office closures, these must be established in advance to ensure that the employee receives proper notice and vacation pay.

## EMRs and Connected services

If you have found coverage, ensure the new physician has access to the necessary tools. If you are unable to find coverage, ensure patient results are monitored/stopped in the EMR (e.g. notify sending facilities). Depending on your involvement level, you may want to set up remote access to certain tools.

[Contact your EMR vendor or OntarioMD for guidance via support@ontariomd.com.](#)

## 6. Notification

Depending on the length and type of your leave, you will need to notify the following:

- Laboratory and healthcare facilities, with pending patient results.
- Hospital if you have hospital privileges.
- Your professional associations such as [OMA](#), [CPSO](#), [CMPA](#), [OHIP](#), [CFPC](#) and [RCPS](#). Some associations may reduce/pause your fees, depending on the length and type of leave.

## During your leave

If you are taking temporary leave due to illness or burnout, it is important to prioritize self-care. Taking time to rest, recharge, and focus on personal well-being supports your own health and helps your return to practice with renewed energy and clarity. Whether it's spending time with loved ones, engaging in hobbies, or simply allowing yourself to unwind, self-care is essential and beneficial for both you and your patients.

## Physician Wellness Resources

- [OMA Physician Health Program](#)
- [List of mental health resources for physicians](#)

- [CMA Physician Wellness Hub](#)
- [CMPA Physician Wellness Hub](#)



# Returning to work

The reason for taking leave (e.g., medical, parental, caregiver) may influence your return-to-work plan. Ease back into work with a phased return or reduced hours. Set realistic expectations, prioritize tasks and monitor your stress for self-care.

## 1. Return to work plan

- Communicate your return with your lead physician/HR administrator.
  - Confirm your return date and upcoming schedule. Review your contract for your return notice obligations, if applicable.
  - Discuss any accommodations or schedule changes required, if applicable.
  - Clarify expectations for reintegration.
  - *Health-related leave*: Ensure you have documented medical clearance.
- Confirm your return date, schedule and expectations with office staff.

## 2. Re-onboarding

- Confirm access to necessary tools, such as reinstated privileges, clinic ID, EMR logins, mask fitting, updated vaccinations (e.g., TB), and any required HR training modules.
- Get informed about any policy, procedural changes, OHIP updates or regulatory requirement that occurred during your absence.
- Arrange a handover if another physician provided coverage.
- Ensure business insurance is reinstated, if applicable.

## 3. Notifications

- Relevant health-care providers.
- Professional associations. Note: You must notify CPSO and CMPA before returning to work.

## Return to work resources

- [WSIB Return to work](#)
- [OMA Return to Work Plan](#)

## Disability resources:

- [OMA Workplace accommodations for doctors with disability and chronic illness](#)
- [Canadian Association of Physicians with Disabilities](#)

## Appendix A | Transition of care checklist

### 1. Patient information review

- Review upcoming appointments, procedures, and treatments.
- Identify patients requiring urgent or follow-up care.
- Ensure documentation is current, complete, and clear in the patient records.
- Notify labs/other healthcare providers of where to send test results and outstanding results in your absence.

### 2. Communication with the covering physician during your absence

- Ensure the covering physician during your absence has access to patient information (e.g. EMR).
- Ensure the covering physician during your absence has the ability to communicate and request patient information pertaining to patients under their care during temporary absences from practice.
- Have a comprehensive handover of critical patient information, including coordination of outstanding tests/reports, ongoing concerns or specific care instructions and patient communication.
- Document all communications and agreements in the patient records.

### 3. Patient communication

- Inform patients about the temporary coverage and any changes in care or appointments.

### 4. Handover back to the primary physician

- Discuss the plan for transitioning care back to the primary physician.

■ [CPSO Availability and Coverage Guideline](#)

■ [OMA Continuity of Care Information](#)  
(member access required)

■ [CPSO Transition in Care Guideline](#)

■ [CMPA Continuity of care: Helping patients avoid falling through the cracks](#)

## Appendix B | Patient Notification Templates (with coverage)

Dear Patient,

I wish to inform you that I will *[on leave/away from my clinic]* from *[start date]* to *[end date, if known]*

During my absence, I am pleased to share that Dr. *[Name]* has kindly agreed to provide care in my place. Dr. *[Name]* is a compassionate and skilled physician who will begin seeing patients on *[start date]*.

If you currently have an appointment booked, *[provide information for patients who currently have appointments – will these be with the new physician or will this need to be rebooked]*

To schedule an appointment with Dr. *[Name]*, please contact *[clinic contact details]*.

Thank you for your understanding, and I look forward to seeing you upon my return.

Sincerely,

*[Your name]*

## Appendix B | Patient Notification Templates (no coverage)

Dear *[Patient]*,

I want to inform you that I will be *[on leave/away from my clinic]* from *[start date]* to *[end date, if known]*.

During my absence, please access alternative health-care services:

- **Health811** (Ontario Telehealth) for medical advice: Dial 811 or visit <https://health811.ontario.ca>
- **Walk-in clinics** for non-urgent concerns
- **Urgent care centers** for conditions that require prompt attention but are not life-threatening
- **Emergency services** (Call 911 or visit the nearest hospital) for serious or life-threatening situations

*[please add any information related to obtaining care in your absence, such as test results, prescription renewals or specific services in your community],*

Thank you for your understanding, and I look forward to seeing you upon my return.

Sincerely,

*[Your name]*