

**Employment Update - Minimum Wage Increases, COVID Screening, CEWS Extended, and Increases to EI**

The past two weeks saw four important legislative developments that will affect employers and employees throughout Ontario:

1. The general minimum wage in Ontario increased to \$14.25.
2. Employers in Ontario are now required to screen employees and essential visitors for COVID-19.
3. The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy has been extended until October 24, 2020.
4. Regular Employment Insurance benefits have increased to \$500 per week.

**Ontario increases the general minimum wage to \$14.25.**

Minimum wage rates in Ontario increase as of October 1, 2020. The increase is tied to the Ontario Consumer Price Index and for the general minimum wage that applies to most employee it will be 25 cents. This will bring the new hourly rate to \$14.25.

Note that the minimum wage rate is tied to pay periods. Accordingly, if the wage increase occurs in the middle of a pay period, that pay period will still be paid at the previous wage rate.

There are special wage rates for students, liquor servers, homeworkers, and other specific classifications, which can be reviewed [here](#).

**Ontario requires employers to perform COVID-19 screening on workers and essential visitors.**

Effective September 26, 2020, Ontario amended O. Reg. 364/20: Rules for Areas in Stage 3 (the “**Regulation**”). All businesses and organizations are now required to screen workers and essential visitors for COVID-19 before they enter the workplace.

The requirement comes from section 2(1)(3) of the Regulation, which reads:

“The person responsible for a business or organization that is open shall operate the business or organization in compliance with the advice, recommendations and

instructions issued by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health on screening individuals.”

In turn, the Ontario Ministry of Health issued the COVID-19 [Screening Tool](#) for Workplaces, which recommends that workplaces screen all employees and essential visitors before they enter the workplace, and includes a set of questions employers should use, at a minimum, for screening. As a result of the Regulation, employers must comply with this recommendation. Notably, the Ministry of Health’s recommendations on this point currently do not include any requirements for the implementation of pre-entry screening. Additional recommendations from the Ministry of Health may create further obligations for employers.

Employers should also remember that they have ongoing obligations to comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. This includes ensuring a safe workplace and following public health directives regarding the pandemic, such as measures to allow self-isolating, physical distancing, and the use of personal protective equipment.

### **Canada extends the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (“CEWS”) to October 24, 2020.**

On September 25, 2020, the federal government announced that the CEWS will be extended for another four-week period between September 27 to October 24, 2020. The government has also suggested that extensions of the CEWS might continue into 2021 if necessary. Our most recent summary of the CEWS can be reviewed [here](#).

### **Canada increases weekly regular benefits under Employment Insurance to \$500.**

As we [previously reported](#), effective September 27, 2020, the minimum weekly taxable benefit for EI was increased to \$400, partly compensating for the end of the CERB. Following its throne speech, the federal government has increased this amount to \$500. The increase puts regular EI benefits on par with the government’s other response benefits.

This publication is intended only to provide general information. It should not be relied on as legal advice. Employers and employees facing specific circumstances should consult their legal counsel for specific advice. For specific legal advice, please contact: [Leslie Dizgun](#), [Allyson Fischer](#), [Mitchell Smith](#), [Justin Anisman](#), [William McLennan](#), or [Alyssa Jagt](#).