



Postgraduate Learner Health and Safety Guidelines

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Note: This Postgraduate Learner Health and Safety Guidelines is for PGME Learners and is an update to the Postgraduate Learner Health and Safety Guidelines approved by PGMEAC in May 2017. This Guideline represents updates and additions that harmonize the definitions of what constitutes health and safety. Accreditation standards as well as language throughout the guideline have been updated accordingly to align with Temerty Faculty of Medicine standards and practice.

Important: This Guideline is NOT for emergency use.

Learners with reasonable concern about imminent health and safety should call 911 or seek immediate assistance from onsite security or other authorities.

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1. PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDELINE

- 1) To promote a safe and healthy environment that minimizes the risk of injury at all University of Toronto and affiliated teaching sites.
- 2) To confirm the University of Toronto Temerty Faculty of Medicine's commitment to the health, safety, and protection of its postgraduate learners.
- 3) To provide a procedure to report hazardous or unsafe training conditions and a mechanism to take corrective action.
- 4) To identify and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the University and Training Sites.
- 5) This centralized guideline regarding resident safety is intended for program-specific additions and/or variations as appropriate.

2. BACKGROUND

Indicator 4.1.3.2 of the [General Standards of Accreditation for Institutions with Residency Programs \(royalcollege.ca\)](https://www.royalcollege.ca/standards/4.1.3.2)

states:

Effective central policies and processes are in place addressing residents' physical, psychological, and professional safety, including but not limited to:

- i. After-hours consultation,
- ii. Complaints and allegations of malpractice,
- iii. Fatigue risk management,
- iv. Hazardous materials,
- v. Infectious agents,
- vi. Ionizing radiation,
- vii. Patient encounters (including house calls),
- viii. Patient transfers (e.g., Medevac),
- ix. Safe disclosure of patient safety incidents,
- x. Travel,
- xi. Violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

For learners covered by the [PARO-OTH Collective Agreement](#) between the Professional Association of Residents of Ontario (PARO) and the Ontario Teaching Hospitals (OTH), residents have dual status of being both postgraduate medical learners registered in university programs and physicians employed by the hospitals. As learners, they are entitled to secure and private call rooms and secure access between call room facilities and service areas. Learners have access to and coverage for Occupational Health Services (including TB tests, immunizations and follow-up, post-exposure prophylaxis and management, personal protective equipment) on the same terms as applicable to other hospital employee groups.

- Accreditation Canada standards indicate that member hospitals must have an operational safety and security program for staff and patients.

- [The Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act](#), 1990, (OHSa) outlines minimum standards for health and safety and establishes procedures for dealing with workplace hazards and protection against risks of workplace violence.
- [The University of Toronto Health and Safety Policy](#) (Governing Council February 1, 2023) states that the University is committed to the promotion of the health, safety, and wellbeing of all members of the University community, to the provision of a safe and healthy work and study environment, and to the prevention of occupational injuries and illnesses.
- The review of this safety guideline is informed by data relating to adverse events involving residents and individuals in resident teaching.

3. SCOPE

The University, hospitals, and affiliated teaching sites are accountable for the personal, environmental, and occupational health and safety of their employees and have the right to make implementation decisions within their respective policies and resource allocations. Postgraduate learners must adhere to the relevant health and safety policies and procedures of their training site. All teaching sites must adhere to the requirements of the [PARO-OTH Collective Agreement](#), unless specifically exempted in the agreement.

These guidelines cover all postgraduate learners, including residents and fellows, and encompass:

Personal Health and Safety including:

- risk of violence or harm from patients or staff;
- access to secure lockers and facilities including call rooms;
- safe travel:
 - between call facilities and service location, and
 - to private vehicle or public transportation between workplace and home; or while working in isolated or remote situations including visiting patients in their homes or after hours; and
- safeguarding of personal information.

Workplace and Environmental Health and Safety including:

- hazardous materials as named in the [OHSa](#); and
- radiation safety, chemical spills, indoor air quality.

Occupational Health and Safety including:

- blood borne pathogens;
- immunization policies; and
- respiratory protection.

4. PERSONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

The University of Toronto Temerty Faculty of Medicine strives for a safe and secure environment for postgraduate learners in all training venues.

- 1) All teaching sites, hospitals, and long-term care institutions are responsible for ensuring the safety and security of learners in their facilities in compliance with their existing employee safety and security policies and procedures as well as the requirements outlined in the [PARO-OTH Collective Agreement](#). The Postgraduate Medical Education (PGME) Office will work with the Medical Education and Occupational Health Offices at these affiliated training sites to ensure adherence to these requirements.
- 2) Locations without a formal health and safety policy or joint committee will be guided by the standards outlined in the [OHSA](#).

Safety and security issues related to Intimidation and Harassment are outlined in the [Guideline for Managing Learner Mistreatment](#)

3) Responsibility of the Program and or Training Site:

[Indicator 5.1.2.2 of the General Standards of Accreditation for Residency Programs \(royalcollege.ca\)](#) states:

Effective resident safety policies and processes are in place, which may include policies and processes defined centrally or specific to the program, and which reflect general and/or discipline-specific physical, psychological, and professional resident safety concerns, as appropriate. The policies and processes include, but are not limited to:

- After-hours consultation
 - Complaints and allegations of malpractice
 - Fatigue risk management
 - Hazardous materials
 - Infectious agents
 - Ionizing radiation
 - Patient encounters (including house calls)
 - Patient transfers (e.g., MedEvac)
 - Safe disclosure of patient safety incidents
 - Travel
 - Violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.
- The PGME Office will provide programs with best practices for orienting learners to individual safety risks. Programs must ensure learners are adequately oriented to policies prior to initiating clinical services.
 - Programs and learners share a responsibility to identify safety risks specific to each location and to the extent possible, will work together to assess safety risks specific to each rotation.
 - Where safety risks exist or are uncertain, programs **may not expect** postgraduate learners to see a patient in hospital, clinic or at home, during regular or after hours, without the presence of a supervisor or security personnel.

- Training sites must endeavour to safeguard learners' personal information, other than identifying them by name when communicating with patients, staff, and families.
- Patient transfers (e.g. MedEvac) must take place with appropriate safety and security measures in accordance with departmental guidelines.
- Learners must be made aware of alternate options when exposing oneself to workplace risks or during travel to and from the workplace (i.e. driving a personal vehicle when fatigued).

Responsibility of the Learner:

- Learners must use all necessary personal protective equipment, precautions, and safeguards, including back up from supervisors, when engaging in clinical and/or educational experiences.
- Learners and programs share a responsibility to identify safety risks specific to each location and to the extent possible, will work together to assess safety risks specific to each rotation.
- Learners must exercise judgment and be aware of alternate options when exposing oneself to workplace risks or during travel to and from the workplace (i.e. driving a personal vehicle when fatigued).
- Learners must use caution when offering personal information to patients, families, or staff.
- Learners are expected to call patients from a hospital or clinic telephone line. The use of personal mobile phones for such calls is discouraged; if used, the call blocking feature should be engaged.
- Learners must promptly report any health and safety concerns (e.g., risk of needle stick injuries, fatigue, etc.) to their supervisor and any personal injury, high risk health exposure or incidence of work-related trauma to Occupational Health or equivalent department at the clinical site and their supervisor.

Reporting Protocol for Breaches of Personal Safety:

- Learners who feel their personal safety or security is threatened should remove themselves immediately from the situation in a professional manner and seek urgent assistance from their immediate supervisor or from the institution's security services.
- Learners cannot be negatively impacted for refusing to engage in clinical or educational experiences if they truly feel at risk in doing so and have communicated this to their Program Directors and respective site supervisors. It is recognized however that there are times (for example, in outbreaks of infectious disease, pandemics or environmental disasters), when a residual risk will remain after all known precautions are taken. Professional responsibility to patients may require engaging in care despite these risks. For more information see the [University of Toronto Health Sciences Committee on Emergency Preparedness](#).
- Learners in hospital/institutional settings identifying a personal safety or security breach must report it to their immediate supervisor at the training site as well as to the program director to allow a resolution of the issue at a local level, and to comply with the site reporting requirements.
- Learners in community-based practices or other non-institutional settings should discuss issues and/or concerns with the staff physician or community-based coordinator or bring any safety concerns to the attention of their Program Director.

- Learners may also report their concerns to [Postgraduate Learner Affairs](#) (PGLA) or to the [Learner Experience Unit](#) (LEU) within the [Office of Learner Affairs](#) (OLA). Consent to do so will be obtained from the learner. Pending investigation and resolution of identified concerns:
 - The Program Director and/or Director/Associate Director PGLA, and/or Associate Dean, PGME have the authority to remove learners from clinical placements if a risk is seen to be unacceptable.
 - If a decision is taken to remove a learner, this must be communicated by the Program Director promptly to:
 - the Chair;
 - the Vice President, Education/Hospital Medical Education Lead or designate at the training site; the Residency Program Committee; the Associate Dean, PGME and the Vice Dean, Medical Education.
- If the safety issue raised is not resolved at the local level, it must be reported to the appropriate decanal lead responsible for the educational program who will investigate and may re-direct the issue to the relevant hospital medical education office or University office for resolution. The learner/faculty member bringing the incident forward will receive a response within 10 days outlining how the complaint was handled or if it will require further review.
- The appropriate decanal lead responsible for the educational program will bring the issue to the hospital office responsible for safety and security, and may involve the University [Community Safety Office](#), Temerty Faculty of Medicine [Office of the Chief Administrative Officer](#) for resolution or further consultation. The OLA will report on safety concerns semi-annually through the Associate Dean, PGME to the [Postgraduate Medical Education Advisory Committee](#) (PGMEAC) and the [Hospital University Education Committee](#) (HUEC) through the Vice Dean, Medical Education.
- Urgent learner safety issues will be brought to the attention of the Vice Dean, Medical Education, Associate Dean, PGME, as well as to the relevant hospital VP Education/Hospital Medical Education Lead or as appropriate.
- The Director/Associate Director PGLA, may at any time investigate and act upon health and safety systems issues that come to their attention by any means, including internal reviews, learner/faculty/staff reporting, or police/security intervention.
- Learners in breach of the occupational health policies of their training site are subject to the procedures by that site consistent with the requirements of the [OHSA](#). If attempts to resolve the situation by internal protocols are not successful, it may be brought to the attention of the training site Medical Education Lead.

5. WORKPLACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY and OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

In the course of their training, postgraduate learners may be exposed to hazardous agents and communicable pathogens. Learners, the University, and teaching sites including hospitals, laboratories and community clinical settings are jointly responsible for supporting a culture promoting health and safety and preventing injury and incidents. Accidents, incidents, and environmental exposures occurring during training will be reported and administered according to the reporting policies and procedures of the University, hospital, or clinical teaching location.

Responsibilities of the Program, PGME Office and Training Site:

- Programs and training sites must ensure learners are appropriately oriented to current best practices for workplace safety guidelines.
- Programs must have guidelines to address exposures specific to each training site (e.g., radiation safety, hazardous materials, infection control), communicate these to learners at site-specific orientation sessions, and assess learners for appropriate understanding prior to involvement in these activities.
- Programs must ensure learners are capable of assessing site and situation specific safety risks.
- The PGME Office will ensure learners have all required immunizations (as per the [Council of Ontario Faculties of Medicine Immunization Policy](#) and the [HUEC](#)) prior to initiating clinical duties. This information will be available to appropriate individuals at the training sites as required via the [Postgraduate Web Evaluation and Registration](#) (POWER) system. Learners not meeting the immunization requirements of the faculty are not permitted to complete their registration with the PGME Office and will not be registered at the hospital.
- The PGME Office will ensure all concerns relating to communicable diseases, including blood borne pathogens, will be reviewed by the Expert Panel on Infection Control, and dealt with on a case-by-case basis prior to finalizing a learner's registration. Disclosure of communicable disease status of the learner will be limited to those required to know in order to provide the necessary procedures to address the health and safety concerns of the learner and others.

Responsibilities of the Learner:

- Learners must participate in required safety sessions as determined by their Program or training site.
- Learners must follow all of the occupational health and safety policies and procedures of the training site including, but not limited to, the appropriate use of personal protective equipment.
- Learners must agree to report unsafe training conditions as per the protocol outlined below.

Reporting Protocol for Workplace Accident/Injury or Incident (See appendix 2):

- A) During **daytime hours** while working at an affiliated hospital or site associated with an affiliated hospital:
- 1) The learner must contact the Employee/Occupational Health Office of the institution.
 - 2) The learner must complete the incident report form as required by the institution's protocol.
 - 3) The learner must report the incident to their immediate supervisor.
 - 4) The learner is encouraged to submit a copy of the report form to their Program office which will then forward a copy to the PGME Office.
- B) During **evenings or weekends** or at a training site with no Occupational Health Office:

- 1) The learner must go immediately to the nearest emergency room and identify themselves as a learner of the University of Toronto¹.
- 2) The learner must report to the available supervisor, comply with the institution's protocol for completion of appropriate incident report forms, and keep a copy of this form to be forwarded to their Program office.
- 3) Incident reports for fellows reported to the PGME office, are sent back to the fellowship program.

Appendix 1: Additional Resources

- 1) [A Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, May 2011](#)
- 2) [Blood and Body Fluid Exposure Policy for University of Toronto Postgraduate Medical Trainees](#)
- 3) [Responding to Learner Mistreatment from Patients, Family Members, and Visitors Guide](#)
- 4) [Respiratory Protection Policy and Procedure for University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine Learners \("Mask-Fit Policy"\)](#)
- 5) Occupational/Employee Health Offices at all University affiliated teaching hospitals
- 6) Contact [PGME Office](#):
 - [Office of Learner Affairs](#);
 - [Learner Experience Unit](#); or
 - [Immunization Officer](#)

Appendix 2: Protocol for Workplace Exposure Injury

¹ Learners who require urgent/emergent care must immediately go to the nearest emergency room. In circumstances where a learner is unsure if their injury is considered urgent/emergent, they should immediately seek advice from their immediate supervisor.



² Learners who require urgent/emergent care must immediately go to the nearest emergency room. In circumstances where a learner is unsure if their injury is considered urgent/emergent, they should immediately seek advice from their immediate supervisor.