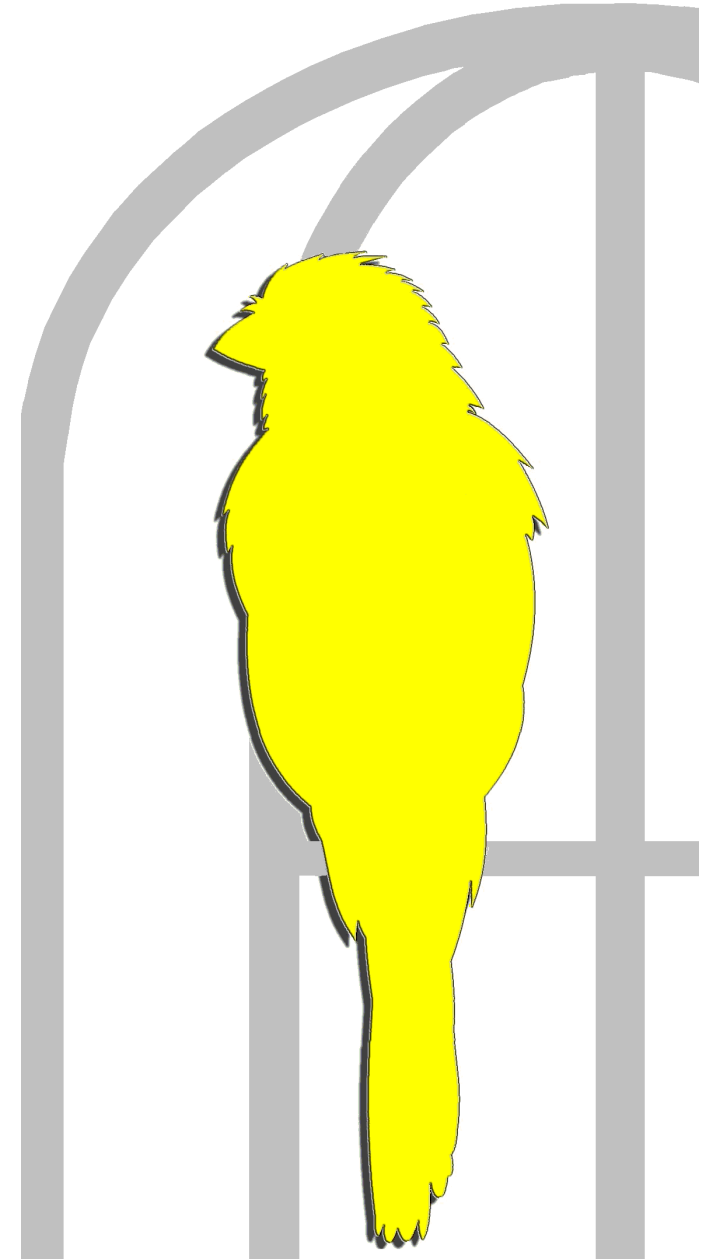


# COVID-19 & Vaccines: OMECC Townhall

---

Paul Sylvestre  
CUPE National  
Health & Safety Branch  
OMECC Townhall September 2, 2021

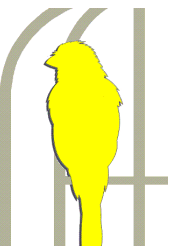
cc:cope491



# Overview

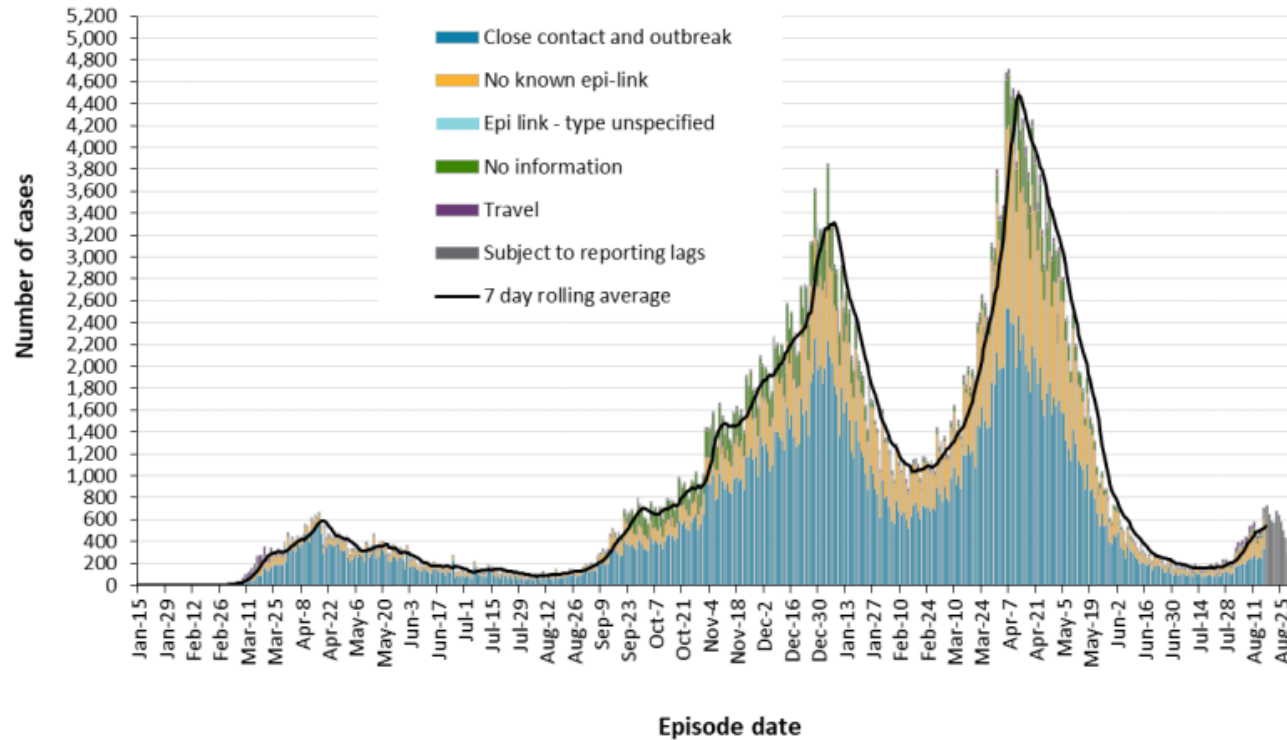
---

- The province has loosened public health restrictions
- Workplace control of COVID-19 risks of exposure have increased
- Employers must reassess the risks

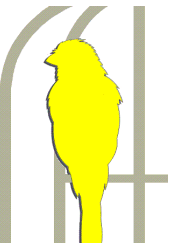


# COVID-19 & Vaccines

- Here's why: We are in a fourth wave: majority are unvaccinated cases (approx. 90%)



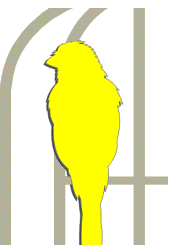
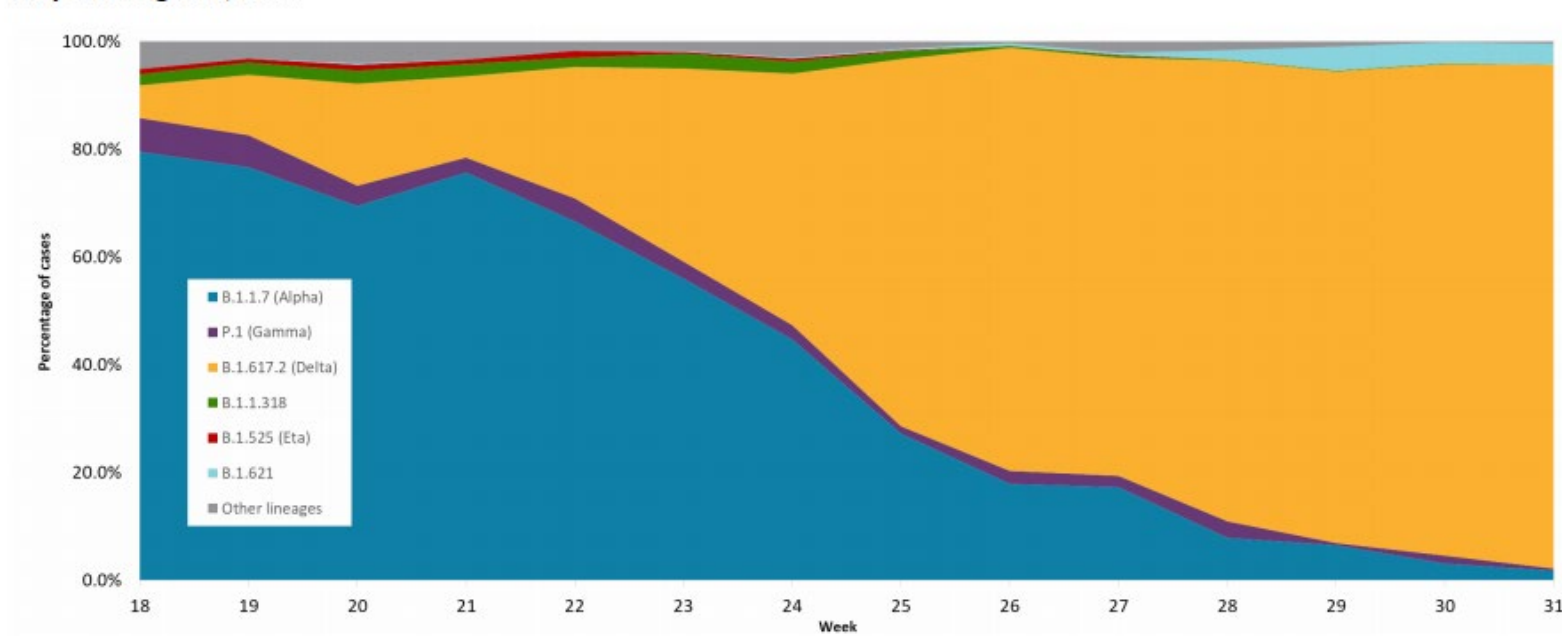
Source PHO August 31, 2021



# COVID-19 & Vaccines

- Delta variant has become the dominant strain of SARS-CoV-2

**Figure 1. Percentage of COVID-19 cases by top 6 most prevalent VOC/VOI lineages and week, representative surveillance, Ontario, May 2 to August 7, 2021**



# COVID-19 & Vaccines

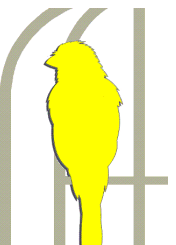
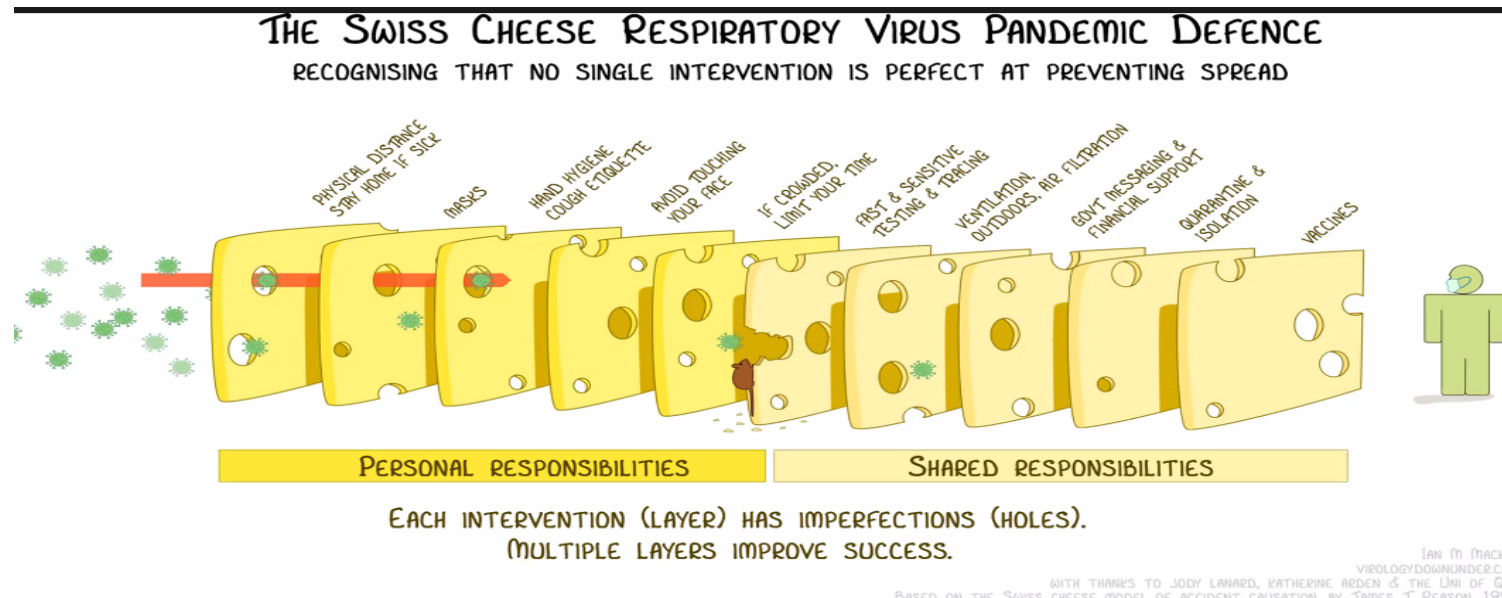
---

- Based on emerging data, what do we know about the Delta variant:
  - Increased risk of transmission - higher viral load
  - Increased risk of infection. Increased case rates in children
  - Increased risk of severe outcomes
  - Increased chance of breakthrough cases; although efficacy remains strong against severe outcomes
  - Unvaccinated individual are at greatest risk of infection and severe outcomes
  - Natural immunity from a previous infection might not be effective
- Vaccines will help end the pandemic. Until that time employers must continue to ensure health and safety measures and procedures are implemented, in consultation with the H&S committee/representative.
- Measures and procedures are reassessed based on emerging evidence or in light of new information.



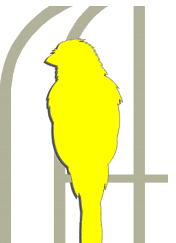
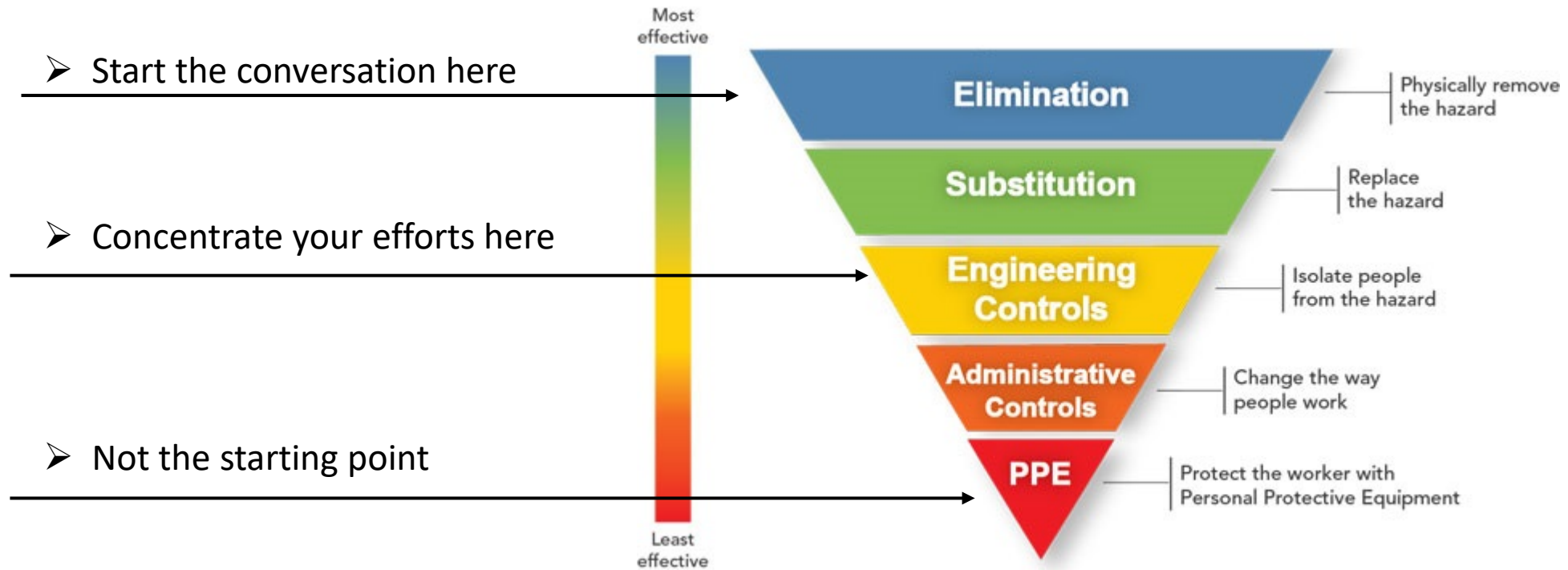
# COVID-19 & Vaccines

- What should the employer do?
  - Reassess the risks of exposure based on increased risks from Delta variant and airborne transmission
  - Continue to adopt a precautionary approach towards occupational health and safety
  - Must not accept a public health “wait and see” approach
  - Start with the best protection first before removing layers of protection.



# COVID-19 & Vaccines

- Where is the conversation with the Joint Health and Safety Committee/Representative?



# CUPE Health and Safety Resources

## ➤ COVID-19 (Re)Assessment Checklists

The pandemic is not over. Vaccination rates are improving the situation. However, we still need to ensure that employers are taking all reasonable precautions for the protection of workers with respect to COVID-19 transmission.

This checklist tool is designed to help workplaces think about all aspects of COVID-19 transmission, including the hazards of aerosols and variants of concern (VoCs). This is particularly important because variants of concern are more easily transmitted and can sometimes escape vaccine coverage.

Any “no” or “N/A” response should be noted and brought to the attention of the (Joint) Workplace Health and Safety Committee or representative for discussion at a meeting.

This checklist is intended to be used alongside CUPE’s [COVID-19: Aerosolization Risk Assessment](#) document.



<https://cupe.ca/covid-19-risk-re-assessment-checklist>

<https://cupe.ca/covid-19-aerosolization-risk-assessment>

<https://cupe.ca/general-health-and-safety-system-checklist-covid-19>

### Aerosol transmission

Risk assessment considerations can and should change over time. This is because they must respond to new information.

Employers have an obligation to remain current on information that is available publicly and is known in their sectors.

During the pandemic, we have learned more about how COVID-19 is transmitted. [The Public Health Agency of Canada](#) and the [Centres for Diseases Control and Prevention](#) now advise that aerosols pose a risk. This means you can become infected by inhaling aerosols or droplets from an infected person. Infected individuals may transmit COVID-19 by talking, singing, shouting, sneezing or coughing.

Risk assessment – aerosol transmission	Yes	No	N/A
Is the risk assessment specific to the workplace?			
Is the risk assessment specific to the work performed?			
Does the risk assessment contemplate situations when and where a worker may have to work <u>within 2 metres</u> of an individual of unknown COVID-19 status and unknown vaccination status?			
Does the risk assessment contemplate situations when and where a worker may have to work <u>for more than 15 cumulative minutes</u> (for the entire workday) with an individual of unknown COVID-19 status and unknown vaccination status?			

# CUPE Health and Safety Resources

## ➤ COVID-19: Prevention through Ventilation

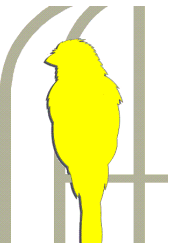
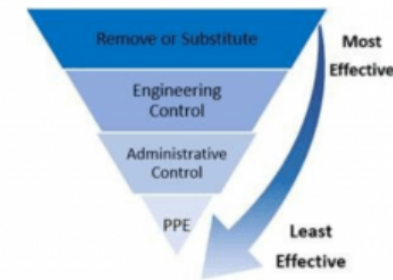


<https://cupe.ca/covid-19-prevention-through-ventilation>

Since the onset of the pandemic, workplaces have implemented a wide range of control measures to reduce the risk of a worker's exposure to COVID-19. There is no single control measure that exists that will fully protect a worker from exposure. Frequently, multiple control methods are used. Many employers have focused on personal protective equipment (PPE) as the first and last line of defense to protect workers. In fact, PPE is considered the least desirable means of controlling a hazard.

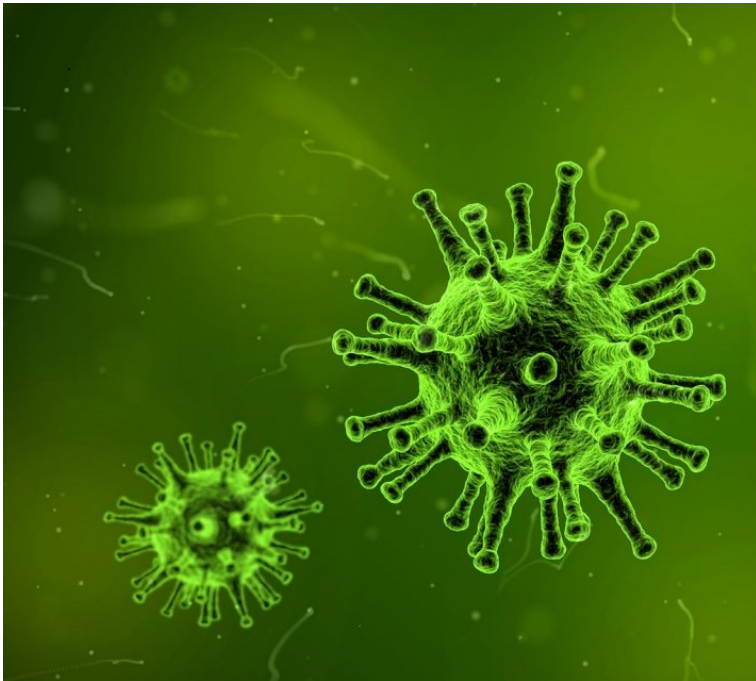
The hierarchy of controls illustrates the types of measures and procedures best placed to eliminate or reduce a worker's exposure to hazards in the workplace. Where elimination and substitution of a hazard are not possible, the next level of effective control is through engineering control, including ventilation.

In terms of COVID-19, ventilation is a critical engineering control to ensure that any infectious virus that may be aerosolized is diluted and exhausted from the workplace. Essentially, when the air is clean in the workplace, the risk of exposure to the virus is lowered. Clean air can be achieved through frequent air changes and the use of filters. A filter with a minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV) rating of at least MERV-13 should be effective to capture virus laden airborne particles; however, High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters are preferred only when the air system can accommodate this level of filter. Before switching to a higher rating of filter, an assessment must be undertaken by an HVAC technician to ensure any increased air resistance does not hamper the performance of the system.



# CUPE Health and Safety Resources

## ➤ COVID-19: Variants of concern – What are they? And why are they important?



<https://cupe.ca/variants-concern-what-are-they-and-why-are-they-important>

### What is a variant?

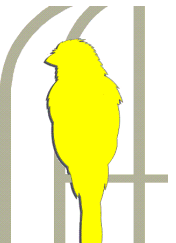
COVID-19 is the disease that is caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV2 or the virus).

During the infection process, the COVID-19 virus enters cells and tricks them into making copies of the virus's genetic information. This genetic information is like a building plan. Using this building plan, new viruses grow and go on to infect other cells. COVID-19 symptoms appear and then worsen as more and more cells become infected.

Virus variants happen as part of this copying process. Just like in any other copying process, you sometimes get a less than perfect copy.

When that happens, there are three general outcomes:

- 1) Nothing really changes – the virus is essentially the same.
- 2) A mistake occurs in the copy which is fatal to the virus. We rejoice! That version of the virus is no more.
- 3) A mistake occurs in the copy that provides an advantage to that version of the virus. This means we now have a variant of concern.



# CUPE Health and Safety Resources

---

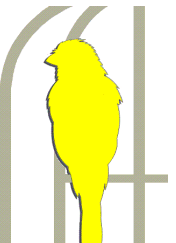
## ➤ New for you



### Tip sheet for dealing with Governmental Health and Safety Inspectors

Jul 29, 2021 Health and Safety

➤ <https://cupe.ca/tip-sheet-dealing-governmental-health-and-safety-inspectors>



# CUPE Health and Safety Resources

---

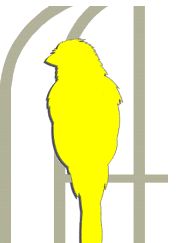
## ➤ New for you - Healthier workplaces, not tougher workers

### Using the right words

Two words you will probably encounter as a union activist working on mental health are **psychosocial** and **psychological**.

Although these words sound similar, they have very different meanings. It's important that we use the right words when fighting for healthy workplace environments.

When it comes to mental health in the workplace, labour representatives advocate for a **psychosocial approach**. But employers and regulators often prefer to take a **psychological approach**.



# Health and Safety Resources

---

- <https://cupe.ca/health-and-safety>
- <https://cupe.ca/covid-19-health-and-safety-practices-0>
- <https://cupe.ca/health-and-safety-fact-sheets>
- <https://cupe.ca/mental-health>
  
- CCOHS - COVID-19 Health and Safety Resources
  - <https://www.ccohs.ca/products/publications/covid19-tool-kit/?&orig=/products/publications/covid19/>
- Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) – COVID-19 Resources
  - <https://www.ohcow.on.ca/covid-19.html>
- WHO - Roadmap to improve and ensure good indoor ventilation in the context of COVID-19
  - <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240021280>

