

# Presumptive coverage for traumatic psychological injuries (first responders, emergency dispatchers and correctional officers)

First responders, correctional officers and emergency dispatchers are routinely exposed to traumatic events at work as part of their normal job expectations. The traumatic events may be life-threatening, very disturbing or stressful and can result in symptoms that are debilitating and require treatment to resolve.

To recognize the challenges in dealing with trauma at work, we provide presumptive coverage for psychological injuries sustained by first responders, emergency dispatchers and correctional officers in specific situations.

## How does WCB apply presumptive coverage?

Presumptive coverage means we will presume that a confirmed psychological or psychiatric injury arose out of and occurred in the course of employment in the following circumstances, unless there is evidence to the contrary:

- A first responder diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**  
 For injuries that occurred on or after December 10, 2012, first responders include firefighters, police officers/sheriffs, emergency medical responders, primary care paramedics and advanced care paramedics.  
  
 For injuries that occur on or after April 1, 2018, this coverage was extended to correctional officers and emergency dispatchers.
- Correctional officers, emergency dispatchers, firefighters, paramedics, peace officers, police officers, or any other class of worker prescribed by the regulations, diagnosed with a traumatic psychological injury following exposure to a traumatic event(s)**  
 For injuries that occur on or after April 1, 2018, presumptive coverage applies for any psychological diagnosis following exposure to a traumatic incident at work, not just for PTSD.

An event is traumatic when it involves direct personal experience of an event or directly witnessing an event reasonably assessed as:

- sudden/unexpected
- frightening or shocking
- having a specific time and space, and
- involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or threat to one's physical integrity.

Interpersonal relations between a worker and co-workers, management, or customers may be traumatic when they result in behaviours that are aggressive, threatening or abusive.

A confirmed psychological or psychiatric injury is one that has been diagnosed by a physician, psychiatrist or psychologist as defined in the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders (DSM).

## What you can expect

When we receive information indicating a worker may have a psychological injury as a result of stressors at work, we may first help the worker start treatment (if necessary).

Next, we will review the information, ensuring:

- the psychological injury diagnosis is confirmed using the criteria established in the most current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).
- when the diagnosis is confirmed to be a traumatic psychological injury other than PTSD we will confirm the nature and source of the traumatic incident(s) at work.

As every worker responds to their injury differently, treatment needs will be diverse. However, most workers will begin with counselling from a community psychologist, along with any medication management provided by their family doctor. Some workers may be referred to a psychiatrist. In either case, injured workers may select their treatment provider.

## How could a psychological injury impact your employee?

Due to their nature, work-related psychological injuries require unique treatment methods and approaches. Awareness of and sensitivity to your employee's condition throughout the recovery process will enhance their likelihood of safely recovering and returning to work, while minimizing risks for regression or delayed recovery.

Psychological trauma affects everyone differently. What may cause one person to develop a psychological injury may not necessarily affect another person the same way.

Psychological injuries can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- anxiety disorders,
- acute stress reactions,
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),
- adjustment disorders, or
- depression.

Similarly, an effective treatment plan for one worker may not produce the same results for another worker.

This [fact sheet](#) discusses how you can support your employee during this difficult time.

## More information for you

You can find information about psychological injuries [here](#).

Information about modified work is found [here](#).

## When in doubt, please call us

Your WCB adjudicator or case manager is a great resource for helping you navigate a psychological injury claim and coordinating a safe return to work for your employee.

We care about your employee's wellbeing and will work with them, the treatment provider and you throughout the recovery process.



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