

January 5, 2022

Support and Protect Retail Workers During the Omicron Wave of COVID-19

Dear Employer,

Nearly two years into a global pandemic, we have reached a new phase with the highly contagious Omicron variant. Those working on the front lines are more at risk than ever of exposure based on the work they do and the interaction they have with hundreds of people per week.

According to Dr. Bonnie Henry, the Omicron variant of COVID-19 now makes up more than 80 per cent of recorded cases in British Columbia. This variant has spread with terrifying speed, with the official numbers likely lagging substantially behind the true rate of infection. The skyrocketing case numbers bear out in our own internal data – we have sent 10 times the normal number of COVID-19 alerts to members in the last week. We know that many of our members are off work and self-isolating, increasing the burden on their co-workers who must work two- and three-times as hard to make up for absences.

Unfortunately, despite public health measures being well-rehearsed at this point, our members have informed us that they are seeing increasing numbers of unmasked people in stores. They have also reported a lack of physical distancing by customers, and a lack of monitoring the number of customers in a store at any time.

We are deeply concerned that the Omicron variant will disproportionately impact retail workers, and **we are calling on you to take several important steps to mitigate the effects, namely:**

- **Have management enforce public health orders around mandatory masks in indoor spaces as well as markers and physical distancing**
- **Actively count the number of customers in stores and limit to 50% normal capacity**
- **Reinstate enhanced cleaning measures in stores**
- **Provide all employees appropriate PPE including 3-layer surgical masks**
- **Pay bonuses to employees working during the Omicron wave of the pandemic**

We know that retail workers will continue support their communities who will heavily rely on them for food and supplies during this next wave. This is why we expect you, as their employer, to continue to take all steps to ensure the safest possible working environment. That includes following through with the above safety items and compensating retail workers for the extra work they are all doing now and will be doing over the weeks and months to come.

Yours truly,



Kim Novak
President, UFCW 1518