

TO: Chair and Members of the Governance Committee

FROM: Alexander Summers Acting Medical Officer of Health; Emily Williams CEO

DATE: 2022 April 21

2021 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Governance Committee recommend that the Board of Health receive Report No. 05-22GC, re: “2021 Occupational Health and Safety Report” for information.

Key Points

- The Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) annual report summarizes the health and safety accomplishments, challenges, incidents and activities of the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC) from the previous calendar year.
- In 2021, the number of employee-reported incidents was 77; an 126% increase when compared to 2020.
- Key accomplishments include providing support to staff during the operation of several mass vaccination clinics and community clinic sites.
- Continued integration of occupational health and safety measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission in the workplace is ongoing.
- The Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee expanded to include an increase in membership and participated in two investigations in relation to two employee-reported incidents.

Background

Occupational health and safety is an integral aspect of any successful organization. Ensuring that all workplace parties are aware of their roles and responsibilities under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) is at the foundation of any health and safety program.

As part of the Occupational Health and Safety Program, the Occupational Health and Safety team submits an annual report ([Appendix A](#)) summarizing health and safety initiatives, employee-reported injuries and incidents, and the activities of the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC) from the previous calendar year. The annual report is shared with staff at all levels of the organization.

Occupational Health & Safety Incidents

The annual report highlights the functioning of the Internal Responsibility System, where each member of the organization has a role to play in supporting occupational health and safety and ensuring MLHU is committed to fostering a safe work environment.

Over the course of 2021, there were 77 employee-reported incidents, which is a 126% increase from 2020. The most common employee reported incidents include: workplace violence; slips, trips and falls; and struck with/caught by/contact with. The largest increase was in workplace violence, with an increase from 17 in 2020 to 37 (118% increase) in 2021; of these 37 incidents, no employees were injured. Incident reporting is regularly encouraged to ensure MLHU is aware of what employees are experiencing on the job and has likely impacted the number of reports received over the course in 2021. In addition, the increase in workplace violence reports

aligns with the global trend of a rise in violence against health care workers and the experience of workers in public health throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Two formal investigations were conducted in relation to a needlestick injury and a critical injury where a staff member suffered a fractured ankle.

Occupational Health and Safety and the COVID-19 Vaccination Program

A large focus of 2021 was the opening and operation of several COVID-19 vaccination clinics. Not only was safety fully integrated into the Incident Management System (IMS) Response model, but the Occupational Health and Safety Program was integrated throughout the clinics from planning to operations and logistics. From health and safety training, to ensuring the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), to providing workstation set up support for clinic workstations, Occupational Health and Safety became integral to many processes within the vaccination clinics.

Through the vaccination campaign, four MLHU immunizers experienced a needle stick while vaccinating clients and five seconded staff from partner agencies also sustained needlesticks in 2021.

The collaboration and integration of safety at the clinic level has set the foundation for continued engagement at the program and team level moving forward.

Like many health care workers in 2021, Health Unit staff began to report an increase in vitriol, harassment and aspects of workplace violence in relation to COVID-19 public health measures, including vaccine mandates. This resulted in an increase in workplace violence-related employee incident reports including reports of verbal aggression, harassment, and threats of physical violence. Occupational Health and Safety provided support to staff, including but not limited to formal safety planning and consultation with key external stakeholders, including the London Police Service.

Next Steps

The Occupational Health and Safety program at MLHU and the work of the JOHSC continue to make improvements for the health and safety of all employees through awareness campaigns, ongoing training opportunities, and ensuring legislative compliance. Further focus on infection control, workplace violence and employee wellness are anticipated over the course of 2022. The current investment of an additional one FTE in the Occupational Health and Safety Program has allowed for further integration and enhancement of health, safety, and wellness at MLHU and is playing an important role in the staff immunization program.

This report was prepared by the Human Resources Team, Healthy Organization Division.



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