

WORKPLACE AND EMPLOYER RESOURCES AND SUGGESTIONS

Several countries across the world are experiencing expanding outbreaks of respiratory illness (COVID-19) caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS CoV-2). The virus is spreading from person-to-person and the number of cases detected in BC, Canada and many other countries is growing. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic making it the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus.

The British Columbia Economic Development Association (BCEDA) is deeply concerned about the impacts this will have not only on individuals, but also local, Indigenous and regional communities. The impact on businesses and the employees should be an important consideration and as such we are doing our best to provide updated information as it comes available.

The following information is taken from various sources and BCEDA recommends that everyone should source out additional information on a regular basis.

How does the virus spread?

Most often, it is spread from person-to-person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how flu and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It's currently unclear if a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. Often, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest) but there is some indication of spread by individuals who are not exhibiting typical symptoms.

Who should seek medical evaluation for COVID-19?

Staff, and subcontracted individuals who are:

- Ill with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have traveled from an affected area in the last 14 days. Please note: This includes travel from all countries and jurisdictions visited and may even include in the United States. Please check for maps of impacted areas to help you determine if you should be checked.
- Ill with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have been identified by our health authorities as a recent close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case or had recent close contact with someone who is being evaluated for COVID-19 infection.

What should I do if I suspect a staff member is at risk for COVID-19?

If a staff member, it is important to place them in a private room away from others and ask them to wear a face mask. Immediately notify your local health authority for details on what to do next. They will provide you with guidance.

Should staff delay or suspend travel to affected areas?

- Check the Government of Canada [travel advisory website](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which employees may travel or use extra caution.
- Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.
- If outside Canada, sick employees should follow your company's policy for obtaining medical care or contact a healthcare provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country.
- Encourage employees who travel to receive all recommended vaccinations, including influenza. It's not too late to vaccinate.

What can I do to prepare for COVID-19 impacts to my workplace? Plan Now!

All employers need to consider how best to decrease the spread of acute respiratory illness and lower the impact of COVID-19 in their workplace. Identify and communicate objectives, including one or more of the following: (a) reducing transmission among staff, (b) protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications, (c) maintaining business operations, and (d) minimizing effects on other entities in the supply chains. Some of the key considerations when making decisions on appropriate responses are:

- **Disease severity** (i.e., number of people who are sick, hospitalization and death rates) in the community where the business is located. Since the intensity of an outbreak may differ according to geographic location, local health officials may be issuing guidance specific to their communities
- **Reviewing your business continuity plan** is always important but it is critical that you do it now. Make sure you and your team members are aware of what you need to do should something happen. Also make sure your list of employees is up to date and available to access remotely – you too may get sick.
- **Impact of disease on employees that are vulnerable** and may be at higher risk for adverse health complications. Inform employees that some people may be at higher risk for severe illness, such as older adults and those with chronic medical conditions. Where possible you may want to consider that these employees work remotely from home.

- **Prepare for possible increased numbers of absences** due to illness in employees and their family members, dismissals of early childhood programs and K-12 schools due to high levels of absenteeism or illness:
 - Employers should plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace. Implement plans to continue your essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism.
 - Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff members are absent.
 - Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products. Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed). In some cases you may need to shrink or add hours to meet the needs of your customers or your staff.
 - Employers with more than one business location are encouraged to provide local managers with the authority to take appropriate actions outlined in their business continuity plan based on the condition in each locality.

What can I do to prevent COVID-19 illnesses my workplace? Implement the following strategies now!

Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:

- Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work for 72 hours after fever is gone and symptoms get better, whichever is longer. Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
- Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare providers may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.

Separate employees who become ill at work:

- Health Canada recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day **should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately**. Sick

employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).

Emphasize respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees:

- Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
- Advise employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.
- Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.
- Avoid the shaking of hands when greeting someone. This is just a new reality for now. There are other ways to greet such as an elbow tap, a bow, or even a casual wave. Have fun with it and lighten the tension that may exist.

Perform routine environmental cleaning: (for more information, refer to [CDC website](#) for businesses)

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
- No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use

Involve your Human Resources department or Employee Health for further guidance or under the following circumstances:

- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to this useful tool development by the CDC for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure. Family medical leave or other legal contracts may apply.
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality.

Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.

When can someone who has had COVID-19 and doesn't work at a healthcare facility return to work?

If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, they should remain under home isolation precautions for 7 days OR until 72 hours after fever is gone and symptoms get better, whichever is longer.

If an employee has had a fever with cough or shortness of breath but have not been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and have not tested positive for COVID-19, they should stay home away from others until 72 hours after the fever is gone and symptoms get better.