

Responding to COVID-19 cases in a workplace

As an employer, you may become aware of one or more cases of COVID-19 among your workforce. By the time people test positive, they often have already infected others. One identified case of COVID-19 may mean there is active spread of the virus at your worksite, as transmission can happen quickly and not all cases are detected.

Public Health is asking people who test positive to take a more active role in notifying people they may have exposed. If you become aware of cases in your workplace, you must respect the medical privacy of your employees and keep their status confidential. However, you can share general information with your staff about self-monitoring and immunization.

You can take the following steps to reduce the risk of spread at your site:

1. **Provide employees (and customers, if applicable) with a self-monitoring letter** to inform them they may have been exposed and to monitor themselves for symptoms.
2. Encourage all staff to book their COVID-19 vaccination through getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca if they have not already done so. Walk-in vaccine clinics may also be available.
3. Review your Communicable Disease plan and ensure all employees understand it.
4. Encourage staff (and customers, if applicable) to **mask in the workplace**.
5. Ensure that workers and others are **not allowed to enter the workplace if they have any symptoms of COVID-19**.
6. Ask your staff to **work from home** if at all possible.
7. Review the next page to determine if **further safety measures** can be taken at your site.

If you would like to discuss how to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread at your location, please do one of the following:

- Call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at 1-888-621-7233 (toll-free within B.C.)
- Call and leave a message with Northern Health's Public Health Protection line at 250-565-7322. In your message you must provide the following:
 - o Your Full Business name and location
 - o Name of person calling
 - o Call back number

HIGH-YIELD ACTIONS TO DECREASE COVID-19 RISK

Healthy staff and healthy customers means healthy businesses. Here are measures you can take now to protect your business.

Communicable Disease plan

Businesses should have a communicable disease plan. The goal of the communicable disease plan is to reduce the spread of illness at your business. Your business's communicable disease plan should include as much of your COVID-19 safety plan as feasible. See WorkSafeBC for more information on communicable disease plans at: [Communicable disease prevention: a guide for employers \(WorkSafeBC\)](#).

Masking of staff and patrons

Employers are encouraged to recommend staff and patrons mask while indoors, especially when they are unable to maintain at least 2 metre distance. Masks must cover the nose and mouth. Face shields are not an adequate substitute. Well-fitting, medical grade masks are better than cloth masks, especially respirator grade masks like N95s.

Ventilation

While physical distancing reduces the risk of COVID-19 spread, COVID-19 can still spread at longer distances, especially in poorly ventilated areas. Take advantage of every opportunity to increase ventilation or use better ventilated areas, including maintaining your HVAC system, opening windows, and holding meetings/taking breaks in larger spaces or outdoors.

Common areas

Make sure there is physical distancing in every place an employee goes during their day, and during every task they perform.

Physical distancing must also apply to all common locations, e.g. lunch rooms, break rooms, bathrooms, punch stations, equipment rooms, locker rooms and any other common areas where employees normally gather.

You can help reduce risk by:

- Setting maximum capacities for all common spaces to ensure there is enough space for physical distancing. Encourage employees to use alternative spaces for lunch and breaks to reduce crowding.
- Limiting simultaneous use of common spaces by different teams of employees

- Re-implementing plexiglass barriers and providing personal protective equipment if physical distancing cannot be maintained at all times.
- Providing employees with their own work vehicles, if applicable.
- Ensuring handwashing stations and cleaning supplies are readily available

Encourage all staff to get their COVID-19 Vaccinations

- COVID-19 vaccination is highly recommended to protect your employees' health and the health of those they work with.
- COVID-19 vaccination will help to prevent future cases at the worksite. It takes up to 2 weeks for the vaccine to start to work and build up some protection against COVID-19.
- Even once vaccinated, all staff should continue to follow all communicable disease infection control measures at the site and in the community to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Support employees to stay home if sick

The cost of having one employee stay home when they are sick is much lower than having your entire workforce end up sick with COVID-19, or stuck in self-isolation due to COVID-19 exposure.

All employees should be required to stay home when they are sick. You can support them to do this by:

- o Offering sick days
- o Not requiring a doctor's note
- o Implementing a daily screening or self-screening process for illnesses
- o Keep a record to ensure it is performed consistently

If employees develop symptoms part way through their shift, they should be supported to leave the workplace immediately.

Gatherings

Encourage your staff to minimize their social gathering outside of the worksite. As a business owner, you can also be a role model for your employees and community in your personal life and encouraging your employees to do the same.

Keep good records

Having detailed logs of where staff worked each day and maintaining a current employee list with contact information and identifying information (e.g. date of birth) will support you to identify close contacts if you become aware of cases.

At large worksites, divide staff into cohorts

In large worksites, minimize staff rotation/movement between different parts of the worksite or between different teams and avoid staff from different parts of the worksite taking breaks together.

This reduces the number of employees exposed if a case is introduced, and can also help to stop an outbreak.

Think about transportation

If you know that your employees carpool or take employer-run transportation to work, take this into account when planning staff assignments. For employer-run transportation, symptom screen before employees board and ensure everyone wears a mask and can maintain physical distance while inside the vehicle.

Good COVID-19 sense makes good business sense

We need to continue to work together to slow the transmission of COVID-19. Thank you for doing everything you can to keep yourself, your employees, your business and community healthy. Visit the [Northern Health COVID-19](#) webpage for more resources.