



Where ideas work

BC Public Service Communicable Disease Prevention FAQs

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Who to contact

For work-related questions not addressed in the FAQs, contact the Workplace Health & Safety Division (BC Public Service Agency) using [AskMyHR](#).

Call 811 or your primary care provider for personal medical advice if you are experiencing any symptoms of illness.

If you think you may have symptoms of a respiratory disease, the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) can help you determine if you need further assessment or testing for COVID-19.

For general information on communicable diseases , go to the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#).

The most current information related to the BC Public Service's response to communicable disease prevention in the workplace (including this document) is available on the [Careers & MyHR website](#).

Part 1: Vaccinations

For fall 2023, the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) recommends British Columbians receive two vaccines – one for the flu (influenza) and one for COVID-19.

Immunization of B.C. residents is a key means of controlling transmission of respiratory disease. The BC Public Service continues to encourage its employees to be current in their vaccinations.

1. Where do I find out about influenza and COVID-19 immunization programs?

The influenza and COVID-19 immunization programs are managed by Public Health. Information is on the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) and [Immunization Plan for British Columbia](#) pages. (See FAQ#2, below, for information on worksite influenza vaccination for BC Public Service employees.)

Getting vaccinated for influenza and COVID-19 is the key Public Health recommendation to British Columbia residents for controlling respiratory diseases in our communities and workplaces.

A guideline on how to identify trusted vaccine information is available from the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#).

2. When may I get my influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations?

BC Public Service employees may get their influenza vaccine through the [Worksite Influenza Clinic Program](#). Worksite clinics are held late October through early December.

The timing of your COVID-19 booster dose is based on your personal health, your age and the time since your last dose. More information on booster vaccines is on the [BC Provincial Vaccination and Immunization page](#). Answers to common questions on COVID-19 vaccines are on the [ImmunizeBC](#) website. Anyone with concerns should discuss vaccination guidance with their health care provider.

3. May I take leave to get vaccinated?

The BC Public Service supports staff in getting vaccinated against influenza, COVID-19 and other vaccine-preventable conditions. All employees may [take leave for medical appointments](#) to get vaccinated or to take their dependent children to get vaccinated. The leave does not need to be entered into Time and Leave if the absence is under two hours of the workday.

Employees may access [supplemental leave](#) to take others who need the employee's assistance to get vaccinated.

It is important that employees discuss scheduling their leave with their supervisor. Supervisors will need some advance notice to consider and address any

operational impacts before approving leave.

Please contact [AskMyHR](#) with any questions.

4. Are vaccinations mandatory for the BC Public Service or for certain positions in the BC Public Service?

As of April 3, 2023, the COVID-19 vaccination requirement for BC Public Service employees is no longer in effect. A small number of BC Public Service employees working in health care settings continue to require COVID-19 vaccination as ordered by the Provincial Health Officer (PHO). For more information, please refer to [COVID-19 vaccination policy for BC Public Service employees](#).

5. Will I still have to follow Public Health guidance and orders?

Yes. All employees must follow orders issued by the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) and regional Medical Health Officers (MHO) to reduce communicable disease transmission.

One change to BC Public Service workplaces as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is that [Communicable Disease Prevention Plans](#) (CDPPs) are now a WorkSafeBC regulatory requirement. Your workplace CDPP should be regularly updated to comply with any PHO orders, WorkSafeBC regulations and any MHO orders for regions or smaller geographic areas. Workplaces should maintain a regular review schedule of all orders and check Careers & MyHR for information on any new

communicable disease prevention protocols.

Part 2: Workplace safety

6. How do regional Medical Health Officer orders impact our workplaces?

Medical Health Officers are delegated to implement orders as necessary to control and limit the spread of communicable diseases in their health regions. For example, increasing transmission of influenza, RSV, COVID-19 or any other communicable disease in a particular region may prompt specific regional guidance that may result in additional workplace communicable disease controls.

Workplaces must implement any orders from their region's Medical Health Officer and document them in their Communicable Disease Prevention Plans.

7. Do I need to do a workplace Daily Health Check?

The Daily Health Check (DHC) is a simple and effective means of checking and reminding employees of their obligation to stay home if sick, and of fulfilling the employer's obligation to ensure that staff with illness symptoms do not attend the workplace.

Workplace Health and Safety recommends that staff attending BC Public Service workplaces complete a DHC. The DHC is an easy reminder to employees of their

personal responsibility to check their health status before coming to work. The DHC also contributes to employees protecting the health and well-being of their co-workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the introduction of [Communicable Disease Prevention Plans](#) (CDPPs) to BC workplaces. CDPPs are now an ongoing WorkSafeBC (WSBC) regulatory requirement.

A key component of CDPPs is supports for staff who have symptoms of a communicable disease (for example: fever, chills, coughing) so they can avoid being sick while at their workplace.

WSBC requires workplaces to outline in their CDPPs the practices that supervisors employ with their staff to ensure no sick or ill workers attend the workplace.

While at the workplace, staff must self-monitor for symptoms and report to their supervisor if they begin to feel unwell. Any employee feeling ill must leave the workplace immediately.

8. Are our BC Public Service workplaces safe?

BC Public Service workplaces were safe throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as public health and WorkSafeBC guidelines were promptly adopted and implemented.

The Public Service Agency actively reviews public health and safety updates and provides ministry leaders and supervisors with updated guidance as required.

Workplaces have implemented [Communicable Disease Prevention Plans](#) following guidance from the PHO, WorkSafeBC and the BC Centre for Disease Control. There are high levels of vaccination in British Columbia and personal vaccination for respiratory and other communicable diseases is the most effective strategy to prevent severe illness.

Safe work practices and making health and safety management a priority keeps communicable disease risk low in BC Public Service workplaces.

There are several layers of protection in our workplaces and they include:

- Reinforcing the importance of employees staying home if experiencing illness symptoms and providing leave benefits to employees

Symptomatic employees not attending the workplace and employees leaving the workplace immediately when feeling unwell

- Supplying hand sanitizer, with cleaning protocols and supplies in place for commonly shared surfaces
- Maintaining heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems that comply with ASHRAE standards for circulating and exchanging air. Safety specialist advice is readily available to resolve any HVAC issues
- Placing physical barriers between employees and clients in some workplaces
- Protocols are in place to manage symptomatic clients who need to

- attend a service delivery office
- Employees may choose to wear a mask anytime and anywhere in their workplace, including at their workstation
 - Mask wearing is recommended for staff when interacting with clients where physical distancing cannot be maintained and there is no physical barrier between staff and client. Mask wearing is also recommended for staff providing client service field work when indoors and distancing or a barrier is not in place, for example when attending a client's residence.
 - Regular reporting and guidance updates from Public Health continue to shape BC Public Service Communicable Disease Prevention Plans

9. Are masks required in BC Public Service workplaces for clients or the public?

Employees may choose to wear a mask anytime and anywhere in their workplace, including at their workstation.

Mask wearing is recommended for staff when:

- Interacting with clients where physical distancing cannot be maintained and there is no physical barrier between staff and clients
- Staff providing client service field work are indoors and distancing or a barrier is not in place (for example: when attending a client's residence)

- Transporting clients or the public in a vehicle (if possible, all occupants over five years old are recommended to wear a mask)

Since many ministries provide essential services to the public that are not available anywhere else, clients are not denied service based on mask wearing or vaccination status.

Public service staff are expected to follow all public health directions. Staff who have travelled outside of the country are expected to comply with any public health requirements for returning travelers.

10. When do we have to review and update our Communicable Disease Prevention Plan?

Workplace Communicable Disease Prevention Plans must be kept up to date to ensure compliance with WorkSafeBC regulations and reflect guidance and direction from public health. PSA Workplace Health and Safety continually monitors for changes that affect workplaces. Information on changes is posted on the [Communicable Disease Prevention Information for BC Public Service Employees](#) page.

All workplaces must review and revise their CDPPs by November 30, 2023.

When changes and updates are made, ensure that staff are notified and trained in new health and safety protocols for your workplace and post your updated Communicable Disease Prevention Plan.

11. Is it likely that building ventilation systems are a route of transmission for communicable diseases?

The American Society of Heating Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) recommends that building HVAC systems be checked and maintained to industry standards to ensure healthy indoor air quality. The Ministry of Citizens' Services Real Property Division oversees and manages HVAC systems for most provincial public service workplaces and is following and adhering to the guidance of ASHRAE and WorkSafeBC.

HVAC systems in all government buildings have always been maintained and operated to industry standards. For example, during the pandemic, maintenance work (for example: filter changes) operating schedules for building systems (when systems turn on and off) and fresh air intake levels were not reduced, even with major decreases in building capacity and occupancy.

12. What are the current cleaning levels in our workplace, and what cleaning should occur when someone in the workplace has a communicable disease?

Routine cleaning that is relevant for your industry and workplace is the norm. Staff should continue to clean in/out of shared spaces and LWS areas and practice good personal and workplace hygiene.

Workplaces should follow the [Exposure Control and Cleaning Protocols](#) for advice

on cleaning after communicable disease or other exposures.

Part 3: Employee exposure and self- isolation

If you have any new or worsening symptoms of a respiratory illness:

Stay at home! As with any illness symptoms, stay at home and do not attend a public service workplace or places where there are crowds or gatherings

Determine if you need to test using the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#)

Avoid close contact with others, especially people at higher risk of severe illness or complications from respiratory illnesses. If you cannot avoid close contact with others, take additional preventive measures as appropriate, including masking indoors, regular hand washing, etc.

You may return to work when any fever has resolved naturally (without aid of medication) and you feel well enough to resume your regular daily activities

If a member of your household has COVID-19 or influenza -like symptoms, or you are contacted by someone informing you that you are a close contact:

Monitor your health daily for symptoms

If you are symptom-free, you may attend the workplace and go about your daily activities

If you have any new or worsening illness symptoms, do not attend a public service workplace

If you begin to experience symptoms while at work, immediately inform your supervisor to discuss work options or if you need to leave the workplace

Use the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#), call 811 or contact your primary care provider for advice

13. When do I need to ask an employee for an ST02 form or doctor's note?

Supervisors should use normal absence management practices to determine when to request an ST02 based on the situation, for example:

- Where the employee has been absent for six consecutive scheduled days of work
- On the third (or more) separate absence occurring in a six-month period which may indicate a pattern of concern

- Where at least 30 days have elapsed since the last statement was obtained and the employee has been in receipt of plan benefits throughout that period and there is a reason to believe the employee's prognosis has changed

An ST02 may be required for safety sensitive occupations or other essential services employees to enable the employer to meet their legislated obligations to plan and manage a safe return to work, including for a communicable disease related illness.

The ST02 form permits management of clearance to safety sensitive occupations and assists managing the workforce with advice regarding prognosis.

The ST02 form also provides consent for the clinical team at Occupational Health and Rehabilitation to work with employees on safe and sustainable return to work programs.

If the Physician's Confidential Portion of the medical certificate is provided to the supervisor, this should be forwarded to Occupational Health and Rehabilitation, BCPSA, 707 – 808 Nelson Street, Box 12183, Vancouver, BC V6Z 2H2.

Supervisors should work with staff on an individual case-by-case basis to assess whether modified duties are available to allow staff to continue working or return to work as soon as their health will allow. More information and support is available on the [Health, safety and sick leave resources page](#).

14. I have an employee who has tested positive for COVID-19. What does this mean for co-workers? Do we need to close that workplace?

To reduce the risk of exposure to others, employees who are symptomatic or ill with a respiratory condition should not attend the workplace if they are feeling unwell and unable to resume their regular attendance.

The ill or symptomatic worker may return to work when any fever has resolved naturally (without aid of medication) and they feel well enough to resume their regular daily activities

Staff should always be monitoring their health. If symptom-free, staff may attend the workplace.

The public service supports staff working from home, where possible, if staff feel well enough to work but illness symptoms dictate not attending the workplace. This should not affect any existing telework arrangements.

Any extra cleaning requirements are determined using the [Exposure Control and Cleaning Protocols](#) on Careers & MyHR.

15. I supervise an employee who tells me they have been exposed to a close contact who has developed influenza-like symptoms. Do they have to self-isolate?

The BC Centre for Disease Control advises that individuals do not have to self-isolate because of a close contact.

All employees must monitor their health daily for symptoms (the [Daily Health Check tool](#) can be used for this purpose) and communicate with their supervisor if they are attending the workplace. If they experience symptoms, feel unwell and are unable to work, they should contact their supervisor, stay home, and if necessary, contact their primary care provider for advice.

The BC Public Service supports staff working from home, where possible, if staff feel well enough to work but illness symptoms dictate not attending the workplace. This should not affect any existing telework arrangements.

16. I am nervous about coming to work and being exposed to influenza, RSV or COVID-19. What can I do?

Workplaces implemented [Communicable Disease Prevention Plans](#) following WorkSafeBC and BC Centre for Disease Control guidance. There are high levels of vaccination in British Columbia and personal vaccination for influenza and COVID-

19 remains the most effective strategy to prevent severe illness.

Communicable Disease Prevention Plans provide a high level of safety in our workplaces. With measures including symptomatic employees staying home when sick, hand washing, routine cleaning of surfaces and public vaccination rates continuing to increase, BC Public Service workplaces remain safe. Employees have the option to always wear a mask if they choose to.

If there are increased levels of risk locally, regionally, or within a workplace, the local and regional Medical Health Officers or the Provincial Health Officer will advise employers on measures needed to manage the risk.

Talk with your supervisor if you have concerns about the risk of workplace exposure to communicable diseases.

17. I have an employee coming back to work after recovering from a respiratory disease that had cold, flu, or COVID-19 like symptoms. This employee feels well and is not having any further symptoms. What should I do?

An ST02 or doctor's note is not required.

Unless otherwise instructed by Public Health, BC Centre for Disease Control states people who have mild symptoms can generally return to their routine activities, including work, once all the following criteria are met:

- Fever has resolved for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication
- All illness symptoms (respiratory, gastrointestinal, and systemic) are improving or have resolved

Coughing may persist for several weeks and does not mean the individual is infectious or must continue to self-isolate.

A worker may continue to test positive on a COVID 19 rapid test for up to 30 days after an initial positive test for COVID-19. The worker does not have to test negative to return to the workplace, but they must meet the criteria above.

In some instances, Public Health or the employee's medical practitioner may recommend additional days away from an indoor public service workplace based on disease severity, among other factors. Talk to the employee about their individualized return to work plan, and if required, request an STO2.

Health care workers (nurses, doctors, care aides) and employees working in group living settings and who have recovered from a respiratory infection may require specialized direction for return to work.

18. An employee has completed an at-home rapid test for COVID-19 and the result is negative. May they come to the workplace?

If the employee is symptomatic and tested negative, they should not attend the workplace until their symptoms resolve, or they are feeling well enough to resume

their regular activities, or they understand their current condition is not linked to COVID-19 or other communicable diseases (for example: not influenza or a cold, and perhaps migraine related or allergy).

If the employee was not symptomatic when they took the rapid test, they can attend the workplace (note, asymptomatic testing is not recommended).

The BC Public Service supports staff working from home, where possible, if staff feel well enough to work but illness symptoms dictate not attending the workplace. This should not affect any existing telework arrangements.

In all cases staff can use the [Daily Health Check](#) or the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) to help assess their health and decide if they should attend the workplace.