



Where ideas work

# BC Public Service COVID- 19 Response FAQs

Updated August 25 2023

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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](#).

For non-medical-related questions about COVID-19 including community protection and reporting options, call 1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319). Service is available from 7:30 am to 8:00 pm seven days a week.

Call 811 or your primary care provider for personal medical advice following exposure or if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

For general information on COVID-19, see the [BC Centre for Disease Control online resources](#).

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

The most current information related to the BC Public Service's response to COVID-19 (including this document) is available on the [Careers & MyHR website](#).

# Part 1: Vaccinations

The Provincial Health Officer (PHO) recommends British Columbians receive both doses of the COVID-19 vaccination and booster. Immunization of B.C. residents is the primary means of controlling transmission of COVID-19. The BC Public Service continues to encourage its employees to be current in their vaccinations.

Effective April 3, 2023, the BC Public Service COVID-19 vaccination policy is no longer in effect.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 specified by a PHO order.

## 1. Where do I find out about the COVID-19 immunization programs?

The COVID-19 immunization program is part of the provincial pandemic response and is managed by Public Health. Information is on the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) and [Immunization Plan for British Columbia](#) pages.

Participation in COVID-19 vaccination is the key Public Health recommendation to British Columbians for controlling COVID-19 in our communities and workplaces. The higher the vaccination rate, the stronger the community protection from existing variants and the lower the risk of new variants.

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

## 2. When may I get a booster vaccine dose?

A booster dose is an additional shot of vaccine that helps you maintain and lengthen your protection against COVID-19. When you get a booster dose, you're helping to protect you and the people around you from COVID-19. The timing of your 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](#).

Updated answers to common questions on COVID vaccines are on the [ImmunizeBC](#) website. Safety data now exists for millions of doses of COVID vaccines, providing valuable clinical information for health care providers. Anyone with concerns should discuss vaccination guidance with their health care provider.

## 3. Will I be able to take leave to get my booster vaccination?

The Public Service supports staff who wish to get vaccinated or “boosted” against COVID-19. All employees may take reasonable time off as paid leave to get the COVID-19 vaccine booster or to take their dependent children to get the COVID-19 vaccine booster. The leave does not need to be entered into Time and Leave.

All employees may take reasonable time off as unpaid leave to take someone considered a close relative, whether by blood or not, who needs the employee's

assistance to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Please discuss scheduling your leave with your supervisor. Provide as much notice as possible to your supervisor so they can consider and address any operational impacts before approving your leave.

Supervisors are encouraged to support employees who require leave to get the COVID-19 vaccine or assist dependents in getting the COVID-19 vaccine and should be flexible in approving the 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?**

Effective April 3, 2023, the COVID-19 vaccination requirement for BC Public Service employees is no longer in effect. For more information, please refer to [COVID-19 vaccination policy for BC Public Service employees](#).

#### **5. Do I have to tell my supervisor or my ministry I have been vaccinated?**

Effective April 3, 2023, the COVID-19 vaccination policy is no longer in effect. This means employees are not required to inform anyone of their vaccination status. For more information, please refer to [COVID-19 vaccination policy for BC Public Service employees](#).

## **6. Are clients or the public coming to our workplace or accessing government services required to provide proof of vaccination?**

No. Due to the essential nature of services provided by the BC Public Service, proof of vaccination is not required for clients or the public. The BC Public Service continues to have layers of protection in place at our offices and all our workplaces are required to have a Communicable Disease Prevention Plan and safety measures to protect against transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

## **7. Do 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.

BC Public Service workplaces require Communicable Disease Prevention Plans that comply with PHO orders, WorkSafeBC regulations and any MHO orders for regions or smaller geographic areas. Workplaces should review all orders and check Careers & MyHR for information on any new communicable disease prevention protocols.

# Part 2: Workplace Safety and Working from Home

## 8. 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 COVID-19 in a particular region may prompt specific regional guidance that could 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.

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

The Provincial Health Officer directs all British Columbians to monitor their health and to stay home if feeling unwell.

A key component of [Communicable Disease Prevention Plans \(CDPPs\)](#) 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.

Workplaces must outline in their CDPPs the practices that supervisors employ with

their staff to ensure no sick or ill workers attend the workplace.

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 symptomatic staff do not attend the workplace.

Workplace Health and Safety recommends that staff attending the workplace complete a DHC.

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

## **10. Is it safe to return to the workplace?**

BC Public Service workplaces have been safe throughout the pandemic as public health and WorkSafeBC guidelines have been 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 COVID-19 remains 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:

- The BC Public Service reinforces the importance of employees staying home if experiencing illness symptoms and provides leave benefits to employees
- Symptomatic employees are not to attend the workplace and must leave immediately if they begin to feel unwell
- Hand sanitizer is supplied, and cleaning protocols and supplies are in place for commonly shared surfaces
- Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are maintained and comply with ASHRAE standards for circulating and exchanging air. Safety specialist advice is readily available to resolve any HVAC issues
- In some workplaces, physical barriers between employees and clients remain in place
- 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

## **11. Can we hold in-person staff meetings in our workplace?**

Yes, workplaces may hold staff meetings (including bringing staff from other work locations) and must follow their Communicable Disease Prevention Plan for meetings. Masks are not required for meetings that only include employees; masks are recommended when meeting with clients if there is no barrier between the client and staff. There are no restrictions on the attendance of staff from off-site or other ministries.

## **12. Our workplace wants to hold a meeting or event for 60 attendees at a rental venue, such as a hotel meeting room. Do attendees have to provide proof of vaccination?**

Effective April 3, 2023, attendees are not required to disclose their vaccination status to attend meetings.

Offsite meetings or events require a Communicable Disease Prevention Plan. For assistance with creating an event-specific Communicable Disease Prevention Plan, please contact [AskMyHR](#).

### **13. 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.

## **14. 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 reflect the latest guidance and direction from public health and WorkSafeBC. PSA Workplace Health and Safety continually monitors for any changes that affect workplaces. Information on any changes is posted on the [COVID-19 Information for BC Public Service Employees](#) page.

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

## **15. Is it likely that building ventilation systems are a route of transmission for COVID-19 or other 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.

## **16. What are the current cleaning levels in our workplace, and what cleaning should occur when someone in the workplace has COVID-19 or any other 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 hand hygiene.

Workplaces should follow the [COVID-19 Exposure Control and Cleaning Protocols](#) for advice on cleaning after communicable disease or other exposures.

# Part 3: Employee Exposure and Self- Isolation **[UPDATED]**

COVID-19 may share similar symptoms with other common respiratory illnesses including influenza (the flu), rhinovirus, enterovirus and RSV. 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 an indoor public service workplace
- 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 COVID-19 or other 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-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 an indoor 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

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

In the circumstance of COVID-19 related absences, an ST02 form or certificate is often not required for sick pay (STIIP). Discussion between employee and supervisor can often resolve questions about prognosis.

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 COVID-19 or 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](#).

## **18. 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 newly diagnosed with COVID-19 or have any COVID-19 symptoms should not attend the workplace if they are feeling unwell and unable to resume their regular attendance.

The ill or symptomatic worker may choose to advise workplace close contacts; this is voluntary. A close contact is being near a person with COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes when health and safety measures (for example: masking, distancing) were not in place or were insufficient.

Staff who are close contacts will need to monitor their health daily for symptoms. 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 [COVID-19 Exposure Control and Cleaning Protocols](#) on Careers & MyHR.

## **19. I supervise an employee who tells me they have been exposed to a close contact. Do they have to self-isolate?**

Unless otherwise instructed by Public Health, the BC Centre for Disease Control advises that individuals do not have to self-isolate because of a close contact.

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 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.

## **20. I supervise an employee who tells me they have been medically advised to self-isolate or stay home as they are sick with a communicable disease. Are they eligible for sick leave?**

Yes. If an employee has been advised by a medical professional to self-isolate or they remain home because they are sick or in hospital for treatment, they are eligible for sick leave.

## **21. I supervise an auxiliary employee who has been medically advised to self-isolate or stay home as they are sick with a communicable disease. Are they eligible for weekly indemnity benefits? [UPDATED]**

Auxiliary employees may be eligible for weekly indemnity benefits up to a maximum of 15 weeks under the same circumstances as an employee eligible for COVID-19 related STIIP. Eligibility and weekly indemnity entitlements shall be in accordance with the applicable Main Agreement.

## **22. I am nervous about coming to work and being exposed to COVID-19. What can I do?**

Workplaces have been following COVID-19 Safety Plans and have 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 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.

### **23. I have an employee coming back to work after recovering from a diagnosed COVID-19 infection 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. If the employee is a confirmed case of COVID-19, Public Health may provide the employee with guidance on when it is safe to resume their regular daily activities.

Unless otherwise instructed by Public Health, fully vaccinated employees 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.

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.

Health care workers (nurses, doctors, care aides) and employees working in group living settings who recovered from COVID-19 infection may require specialized direction for return to work.

## **24. An employee has completed an at home rapid test and the result is negative. May they come to the workplace?**

Rapid tests are best at detecting COVID-19 when someone is experiencing COVID-like symptoms. A negative result means that COVID-19 was not detected at the time of the test. This does not guarantee that someone does not have COVID-19.

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 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.

## Part 4: Employee Exposure Related to Travel

### **25. With current federal BCCDC recommendations, can employees undertake work-related travel?**

Yes. Travel is allowed for work and recreational purposes. When traveling, check for any local COVID-19 or other communicable disease prevention protocols and follow the same Public Health guidance you use at home to prevent COVID-19. For international travel, be sure to check the [Transport Canada site](#) for any travel-related protocols.