

# BC PUBLIC SERVICE COVID-19 VACCINATION POLICY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Updated June 17, 2022

- For information on how to get your COVID-19 vaccination in BC, visit the [provincial vaccine registration website](#).
- For information on how to get a proof of vaccination document (digital or paper), visit [Proof of vaccination and the Federal proof of vaccination requirements](#).
- For more Information on contractors and other parties working in employee-only areas of BC Public Service workplaces, see [COVID-19 vaccination: contractors and other parties](#) on MyHR

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## 1. What is required under the BC Public Service COVID-19 vaccination policy? [UPDATED]

On October 5, 2021, the Deputy Minister to the Premier announced BC Public Service employees will be required to provide proof of full vaccination against COVID-19 effective November 22, 2021.

Employees who do not provide proof of full vaccination or refuse to disclose their vaccination status by November 22, 2021 will be considered unvaccinated. Employees who can show proof they have one dose of an approved two dose COVID-19 vaccine will be considered partially vaccinated. Employees with one vaccination dose must provide proof of the date of their first dose.

Fully vaccinated means you have a BC Vaccine Card or Government of Canada Proof of Vaccination confirming you are fully vaccinated or can provide equivalent proof from another province or country.

Employees and supervisors/managers should note that, [by regulation under the Public Service Act](#), compliance with the COVID-19 vaccination policy is a term and condition of employment.

## 2. Why is the BC Public Service implementing this policy?

Throughout the pandemic, the BC Public Service has aligned its response to support the overall provincial pandemic response and has followed the guidance of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO). Implementing the COVID-19 vaccination policy is consistent with that direction and is one additional measure to ensure our workplaces are as safe as possible. We also recognize that we have a role to play in supporting the provincial effort to increase vaccination rates to protect the health of our colleagues and our communities.

While all employees must comply with the policy, some individuals may find doing so personally challenging. All employees are reminded that, regardless of our views on vaccination or this policy, we have an obligation to treat one another with kindness, respect and professionalism and must adhere to our responsibilities under the [Standards of Conduct](#) at all times.

## 3. Does this policy apply to all employees?

The policy applies to any employee working for the BC Public Service, whether they work onsite in a public service workplace or remotely.

Employees and supervisors/managers should note that, [by regulation under the Public Service Act](#), compliance with the COVID-19 vaccination policy is a term and condition of employment.

This policy applies to any government organization with BC Public Service employees that are hired under the Public Service Act, including any Board, Commission, Agency, or other organization to which the Public Service Act applies or whose employees are hired in accordance with the Public Service Act. However, where a Board, Commission, Agency, or organization can demonstrate that it has a comparable COVID-19 vaccination policy, it will not be obliged to apply the specific requirements as set out in this policy.

Complementary to the new COVID-19 vaccination policy, the BC Public Service Occupational Safety and Health policy has also been updated to require staff from other employers working alongside

BC Public Service employees in our workplaces to be fully vaccinated. Neither policy applies to members of the public entering a BC Public Service workplace or interacting with a BC Public Service employee for the purposes of receiving a government service.

#### 4. If I work from home full-time, am I required to provide proof of vaccination?

Yes. The BC Public Service has an obligation to take appropriate measures to provide for the health and safety of any employee while they are performing the duties of their job. Employees with telework agreements are not exempt from this policy.

#### 5. How do I provide proof of my vaccination? [UPDATED]

Beginning November 8, 2021, your supervisor or a manager designated by your ministry can ask for proof of vaccination. Providing proof must be done by showing a digital or paper version of the fully vaccinated BC Vaccine Card or the Government of Canada Proof of Vaccination. Proof of vaccination must be shown either in person or via a live videoconference. Emailed, photocopied, or verbal verifications will not be accepted as proof of vaccination. Proof of vaccination can be requested by a manager at any time starting November 8, 2021.

Employees who, for various reasons related to their current employment status, such as extended leave, are unable to provide proof of vaccination between November 8 and 22, 2021 will be required to provide proof prior to their return to work.

Employees, including supervisors, will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination if they are found:

- To have deliberately falsified or misrepresented their vaccination status; or
- To have aided another employee to deliberately falsify or misrepresent their vaccination status.

For information on how to get your proof of vaccination, visit [Proof of vaccination and Federal proof of vaccination requirements](#) websites.

#### 6. What if I am not fully vaccinated on November 22? [UPDATED]

Partially vaccinated employees (those with only one COVID-19 vaccine dose of a [two dose regime as approved by Health Canada](#)), may be offered alternative work arrangements and will be required to provide proof of full vaccination within 35 days of having received their first dose. Partially vaccinated employees who are not fully vaccinated within that timeline will be placed on unpaid leave.

Unvaccinated employees, except those who have been granted a medical exemption or other accommodation, will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence for three months. Unvaccinated employees will not be able to use vacation or other banked leave time in lieu of leave without pay. After three months of being placed on leave without pay, unvaccinated employees may be terminated.

Unvaccinated employees who have been placed on leave without pay, and who become partially vaccinated within three months of being placed on leave without pay, may be offered alternative

return to work arrangements. They must then confirm full vaccination within 35 days of having received their first dose. Employees who do not receive their second vaccine dose within 35 days will return to unpaid leave. If not fully vaccinated three months after they first were placed on unpaid leave, they may be terminated.

Applicants applying for positions after November 22 who are new to government must be fully vaccinated before they can start work.

For information on how to get your COVID-19 vaccination in BC, visit the [provincial vaccine registration website](#).

**7. It has been more than 4 weeks since my first vaccine dose but I still haven't received an invitation to book an appointment for my second dose, which means I may not be able to make the 35-day timeline to be fully vaccinated. What should I do?**

Due to recent changes in the provincial vaccination scheduling system, you may not receive an automatic invitation for a second appointment until 8 weeks after your first dose. However, the Ministry of Health advises that you can still request an appointment as early as 4 weeks after your first dose if your employer has a proof of vaccination policy that requires it. You can request an earlier appointment by phone by calling 1-833-838-2323. If you have trouble booking a second dose within 35 days of your first, talk to your supervisor who can consult with MyHR for guidance.

**8. I'm a supervisor of a partially vaccinated employee who has scheduled a second shot but it's not within 35 days of their first shot. Should I grant them an extension or place them on leave?**

Partially vaccinated employees may be unable to book a second shot within 35 days in some locations. Ask the employee to provide the date of their second shot and contact [MyHR](#) for assistance.

**9. If I have had a prior COVID-19 infection am I still required to be fully vaccinated?**

Yes. Employees who have had COVID-19 are still required to be immunized with COVID-19 vaccines. Not everyone develops a strong immune response after having COVID-19, and the vaccine is the best way to ensure immunity. Please refer to the [BCCDC Vaccine Information](#) website.

**10. I have an employee on leave who was unvaccinated or refused to disclose their vaccination status. Now they have one vaccine, and they want to return to the workplace. Can I allow them in the workplace?**

Supervisors will need to determine the type of vaccine the employee received (i.e. either the first dose of the Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca, or the single dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine).

If the employee received a first dose of Pfizer, Moderna, or AstraZeneca, then you should follow the instructions provided by your ministry's Strategic Human Resources contact for unvaccinated employees who have become partially vaccinated.

If the employee has received the single dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine, please contact [MyHR](#) for assistance as they may need to follow additional enhanced COVID-19 protocols after they return to the workplace depending on the date of their vaccine.

### **11. What happens to my benefits coverage if I am placed on unpaid leave?**

Your employer-paid benefits coverage (such as health, dental and employee basic life insurance) will continue to be provided for a period of up to three months if you were previously eligible for benefits prior to the beginning of the leave. Your share of the employee basic life insurance premium will fall into arrears and be recovered when you return to work.

Access to [Employee and Family Assistance Services](#) is available to all employees placed on this leave.

If you are on unpaid leave one calendar month or more and you wish to maintain the following Optional Insurance benefits, you need to complete an [Option to Continue Benefits Form](#) found online via MyHR and pay your premiums:

- Optional Family Funeral Benefit
- Employee Optional Life Insurance
- Spouse Optional Life Insurance
- Child Optional Life Insurance
- Employee Optional Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance
- Spouse Optional Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance
- Child Optional Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance

Employees must apply for optional benefits – it is not automatic. Once you submit your [Option to Continue Benefits Form](#), you will be invoiced for any Optional Insurance benefits and payment must be received within 30 days of commencement of the leave. If payment is not received within 30 days, there is no further option to continue the Optional Insurance Benefits. If you do not maintain your Optional Life Insurance benefits, they will be considered waived.

If you return within three months (90 days) from the start of your leave, any optional life insurance plans will be automatically reinstated. If you return after three months (90 days) from the start of your leave, any optional life insurance plans that does not require evidence of insurability can be reinstated. You'll need to reapply for optional employee and/or spouse optional life insurance and provide evidence of insurability. The insurance will not be effective until the carrier approves the application.

### **12. What is the impact on my public service pension if I am placed on leave without pay?**

During an unpaid leave, you do not contribute to the pension plan, and you do not accumulate any pensionable or contributory service. If your leave without pay is concluded and you remain an employee of the public service, you may be able to purchase this service. Information on deadlines and how to apply can be found on the [Purchase of Service](#) page on MyHR.

### **13. What if I believe I am unable to be vaccinated for medical or other human rights reasons?**

Effective November 8, 2021, employees may request an exemption from the vaccine requirement based on a medical condition or other protected ground as defined under BC's Human Rights Code. Note that personal preference is not considered a legitimate rationale for the employer to provide an accommodation.

Employees must submit an exemption request in writing to their excluded manager, an included supervisor or a specific manager who has been delegated this responsibility in your organization. The request must contain complete and accurate information describing the need for accommodation including information on relevant limitations, restrictions, and their vaccination status. Supervisors must submit the accommodation request to MyHR for guidance and recommendations. More information on the accommodation process is available on [MyHR](#).

If a request for accommodation is not resolved by November 22, alternative work arrangements will be considered until a decision on accommodation is confirmed.

Employees with medical concerns are encouraged to speak with their primary care physician and review the BC Centre for Disease Control information about [medical conditions and COVID-19 vaccinations](#).

#### **14. If my request for accommodation is approved, will I be allowed to work from home full-time?**

Requests for accommodation under the COVID-19 vaccination policy are separate and distinct from those sought under the flexible work policy for the BC Public Service. The outcome of accommodations depends on the specifics of the individual request. However, an accommodation under this policy would, in most cases, only mean the employee is exempt from the need to provide proof of full vaccination. This may result in alternative work arrangements, but that does not necessarily mean a flexible work arrangement.

#### **15. What if my request for accommodation is denied? Do I have any recourse to review the decision?**

The duty to accommodate is not about employee preferences; it is about removing discriminatory barriers related to the prohibited grounds of discrimination in BC's Human Rights Code, up to the point of undue hardship to the employer. Please refer to your collective agreement or Terms and Conditions of Employment to determine what recourse may be available.

#### **16. If my request for an accommodation is denied, how long do I have to become fully vaccinated?**

The dates in the policy apply to everyone, and you will immediately be sent home on leave without pay after November 22 or when your accommodation is denied, whichever is later. You may be allowed back with an alternative work arrangement when you have received your first dose. Your alternate work arrangement will cease once you are fully vaccinated.

#### **17. What is meant by “alternative work arrangements” for partially vaccinated employees or those seeking an accommodation?**

Employees who are only partially vaccinated on November 22 may be offered alternative work arrangements until they are fully vaccinated. Similarly, employees who are still awaiting resolution

of a request for a medical exemption or other accommodation may be offered alternative work arrangements.

The nature of those arrangements will depend on the individual circumstances and any applicable collective agreement provisions. However, possible alternative work arrangements could include measures such as temporary reassignment to other duties or locations and/or a requirement to wear a mask in the workplace.

Supervisors should contact MyHR for support in determining appropriate alternative work arrangements where required.

### **18. As a supervisor or delegate, what do I need to do to determine employees' proof of vaccination?**

Beginning November 8, 2021, supervisors may begin asking employees to provide proof of their vaccination status (see question 5). An employee has until November 22, 2021 to provide proof of vaccination to their supervisor. A ministry may designate an alternate contact, such as a member of its SHR department, if an employee does not wish to disclose their proof of vaccination to their direct supervisor.

Your ministry SHR department will provide all supervisors with a Proof of Vaccination Confirmation Form (excel spreadsheet) that must be used to record the outcome of the disclosure process. Supervisors must not record any information beyond what is required to complete the template. The completed template must be emailed to the designated contact in the ministry's SHR department by end of day, November 23, 2021.

Before November 22, ministry SHR departments and the BC Public Service Agency will provide guidance and resources to support supervisors in the required follow-up with employees not in compliance with the policy. Guidance will also be provided through recorded all-supervisor's calls. Updated resources for supervisors will be available on [MyHR](#).

No employee, including supervisors, should share or discuss the vaccination status of colleagues outside the process required by the COVID-19 vaccination policy. Employees are not required to provide a rationale for being unvaccinated, and supervisors are expected not to engage with their employees in debate of the merits of the COVID-19 vaccination policy.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that employees are aware that harassment or other prohibited conduct directed toward an individual for any reason, including based on their vaccination status or accommodation measures, will not be tolerated.

Employees are expected to conduct themselves professionally during the proof of vaccination process and are responsible for ensuring that their conduct contributes to a respectful work environment.

### **19. What if I am on STIIP, LTD or other approved leave?**

Employees who for various reasons related to their current employment status, such as extended leave, are unable to provide proof of vaccination by November 22, 2021 will be required to provide proof prior to their return to work.

Managers and supervisors should inform staff on these types of leave that proof of vaccination will be part of the return-to-work planning process. Supervisors and managers must request proof of vaccination in order to facilitate return to work planning and to ensure the staff member on leave provides proof of vaccination to coincide with their planned return to work date.

## **20. Will my vaccination be recorded and tracked by the employer?**

Personal information on vaccination will be collected, retained, used, and disclosed in a manner that respects the provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. An employee's vaccination status will only be shared with other individuals where required to enable the implementation of the COVID-19 vaccination policy.

In the case of accommodations, any information related to an employee's personal medical information will be treated with the same level of confidentiality that would apply with any other accommodation request.

## **21. What about new employees who join the BC Public Service after November 8?**

Consistent with the COVID-19 vaccination policy, confirmation of full vaccination will be required from anyone accepting a new role in the BC Public Service with a start date on or after November 8. Exceptions will be considered where there are valid grounds for accommodation.

Effective November 8, 2021, the requirement to be fully vaccinated will be included in all job postings and offer letters. Confirmation of full vaccination will occur as part of the hiring confirmation process or as part of pre-employment assessment and screening depending on the type of job posting.

Any candidate being offered a position prior to November 8, 2021 should be made aware of the COVID-19 vaccination policy during the offer process. Employees who joined the BC Public Service between October 5, 2021 and November 8, 2021 will be expected to become partially vaccinated by November 22 and fully vaccinated 35 days after receiving their first dose. This flexibility is in recognition of them potentially not having sufficient time to become fully vaccinated before November 22, 2021.

## **22. Does my workplace or ministry have to check for proof of vaccination from janitorial staff or other building services?**

No. The Ministry of Citizens' Services, Real Property Division has been working with their industry partners to ensure vaccination of building maintenance and contractor staff. Ministries and workplaces also do not need to confirm vaccination status of anyone who may be entering the office after hours or on weekends when staff are not present. For more information on contractors and other parties in employee-only areas of the workplace, see [COVID-19 vaccination: contractors and other parties](#) on MyHR

### 23. How long will this policy be in effect?

The policy will be in effect until general public health concerns regarding COVID-19 are reduced to a level, prescribed by government, to enable workplaces to operate without COVID-related restrictions.

### 24. What if public health requirements for full vaccination change, such as the recent announcement of vaccine boosters?

The policy will be reviewed and updated as needed based on guidance and directives from the Provincial Health Officer. When announcing the plans for offering vaccine booster doses, the Provincial Health Officer indicated that does not change what is considered fully vaccinated at this time.

### 25. What resources are available to support employees who may find this policy personally challenging?

- Authoritative information on COVID-19 and approved vaccines is available on the [BCCDC Vaccine Information](#) website
- The BCCDC website also offers helpful information on how to [identify reliable information on COVID-19 vaccines](#).
- All BC Public Service employees have access to counselling support through [Employee and Family Assistance Services](#)
- Additional [mental health supports](#) are available to all British Columbians