

Emergency Support Services (ESS) Program COVID-19 Information Effective Date: 19 March 20 until Updated or Rescinded Updated 26 May 2020

Emergency Support Services Responders

The information below is intended to support the health and safety of the [Emergency Support Services \(ESS\)](#) program during this period of heightened concern.

The safety of responders remains a top priority and all ESS teams are encouraged to follow the guidance and precautions from the Ministry of Health, Worksafe BC, the Provincial Health Officer and the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC). In all levels of response, teams should adhere to recommendations from the Provincial Health Officer around gathering size to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

Training may be conducted at the discretion of the Local or First Nations' Government. EMBC recommends that ESS teams who choose to continue training limit the size of the session, consider online training alternatives and observe physical distancing as recommended by the Provincial Health Officer.

ESS leadership are directed to the BCEMs response priorities, the first of which are:

1. Ensure the health and safety of responders
2. Save lives
3. Reduce suffering
4. Protect public health

Special attention should be taken to guide all actions towards these priorities.

Recommended Precautionary Measures

To ensure the Province of British Columbia is in the best position to protect responders, EMBC offers the following recommendations to promote regular and thorough hand washing and promote good respiratory hygiene in the workplace:

- Place sanitizing hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the workplace.
- Increase hand sanitizer supplies in high traffic areas and public counters.
- Display posters and provided visual aids promoting hand-washing/hand-sanitizing and promoting respiratory hygiene.

These common-sense practices help prevent infection and transmission:

- Hand washing.
- Sneeze or cough into your elbow.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Practice physical distancing (a minimum of 2 metres/about 6 feet).

EMBC also recommends taking steps to increase the frequency and depth of facility cleaning as a preventative measure to further protect employees, responders and the public.

Supervisors at all levels should consider the risk that a responder could pose by endangering the health of multiple other essential service staff, which could jeopardize the ability to provide essential services. ESS responders should follow the recommended 14-day self-isolation after international travel and ensure responders know not to deploy if they are symptomatic. We are asking people to self-monitor their health and to apply a low threshold when feeling unwell to stay home until they are better.

Supervisors should reinforce at the beginning of an activation or training that if anyone starts to feel unwell as the day progresses, they have the right and responsibility to leave to protect others. Sometimes people need permission to self-evaluate if they feel they are needed at a worksite. If a responder is visibly ill (coughing, signs of fever), avoid generating stigma and approach them with privacy and respect while minimizing contact. Provide information from this document or other provincial health documents. Report the situation to your ESSD or Emergency Program Coordinator.

Anyone who is concerned that they, or someone with whom they have had close contact, may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should cease work when safe to do so, self isolate and contact their health-care provider or call public health at 8-1-1. If an ESS responder is planning to see a health care provider about suspected COVID-19, they should inform their health care provider when calling for an appointment so that appropriate protective measures can be taken.

As an ESS responder, you are not obligated to respond to an activation. If you have concerns about your personal health and safety, you have the right to refuse responder support roles in the ESS program. See [Occupational Health & Safety – Guidelines Part 3.12 Refusal of Unsafe Work](#). The [ESS Publications page](#) contains procedures for delivering ESS remotely.

Should a responder respond to an activation, note the following procedural recommendations for all ESS responders:

ESS Level One Response Considerations

- A responder should not deploy if they feel unwell or if you are symptomatic or if you've been in close contact with a symptomatic person.
- Greet others with a smile, but no handshakes or hugs, maintaining appropriate physical distance from evacuees.
- Consider use of a non-medical mask if physical distancing will be difficult to maintain.
- ESS responders should perform hand hygiene frequently. Should an evacuee disclose that they are unwell, advise the ESSD or Incident Commander immediately. The ESS responder should minimize contact with the evacuee and seek to isolate them. This should be done in a private and respectful manner. The local health authority should be contacted to determine next steps.
- Ask those you are supporting if they are sick or have been sick recently. If the answer is yes, please advise the site supervisor immediately. Responders should minimize contact with the subject and seek to isolate them. This should be done in a private and respectful manner. The local health authority should be contacted to determine next steps.

ESS Level Two/Three Response Considerations

In addition to the points above, the following are considered best practice for larger ESS events.

- Prominently display signage promoting basic infection control measures and physical distancing in effect in the facility. Resources are located on the [BC CDC website](#).
- Restock your “Grab & Go” kit, and ensure it includes hand soap, hand sanitizer and gloves.
- Registration & Referral supervisors should make available sanitation equipment. Follow guidelines as posted on the BC CDC and Ministry of Health’s [Considerations for Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings](#).
- Set up tables at the Registration & Referral stations to ensure a safe distance between evacuees and responders.
- Evacuees within the Reception Centre (RC) should strictly adhere to social distancing recommendations, and these should be reinforced by the RC staff. A revised floor plan may be required to incorporate the appropriate spacing. Evacuees wait time may be longer.
- Registration & Referral workers should maintain a greater distance from the evacuee and avoid exchanging items such as pens or paper. Complete all the paperwork before asking the evacuee for their signature to limit the evacuee touching the paperwork more than once.
- Registration & Referral responders should follow the recommendations provided by the Provincial Health Officer, Worksafe BC and their respective Local or First Nations’ Government

As per the EMBC Memorandum on Group Lodging (effective as of 19 March 2020), EMBC **strongly recommends against the use of Group Lodging to support evacuated populations**. ESS responders should further note recommendations for safety provided by [WorkSafe BC](#) in addition to any other safety requirements of the activity they perform.

The [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) advises that wearing a cloth or non-medical mask is a personal choice that should be respected. Some people can spread the virus when they have very mild symptoms or may be unaware they are infected. In this case, wearing a mask can help in containing your own droplets and protect others but it will not protect you from COVID-19. Consider the use of non-medical masks when physical distancing isn’t possible.

Keep in mind that masks may give a person a false sense of security and are likely to increase the number of times a person will touch their own face (e.g., to adjust the mask). Any mask, no matter how efficient at filtration or how good the seal, will have minimal effect if it is not used together with other preventive measures, such as frequent hand washing and physical distancing. Medical masks and N95 respirators should be reserved for healthcare workers. Additional information on the use of masks can be found on the [BC CDC website](#).

WorkSafeBC adjudicates all worker claims and the province cannot provide advance assurance that a claim will be eligible in any particular circumstance. Information on coverage and liabilities for responders can be found on the [EMBC Policy website](#), notably Policy 5.07 and 5.08. Supervisors should familiarize themselves with [workplace recommendations](#) from the BC Centre for Disease Control. Additionally, the BC Centre for Disease Control maintains a [commonly asked questions](#) page to inform safe work practices.

The Federal Government has provided additional clarification about who is eligible for [Employment Insurance](#) to include compensation for people who are ill or have to self-isolate, including people who would not normally be eligible such as self-employed people.

Additional amplifications and considerations for each PSLV discipline may be released as new information becomes available. ESS updates are posted on the [ESS Publications page](#). Questions regarding this or other PSLV or ESS policies or direction should be directed towards a relevant EMBC regional office or activated Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC).