Communicable disease prevention
A guide for employers

> This guide is not meant for employers who have an existing exposure control plan (ECP) related to communicable disease, such as health care employers. See section 6.34 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation for more information about ECPs.

As COVID-19 vaccinations have become widely available to British Columbians, the overall risk of COVID-19 transmission and serious consequences has diminished. Despite this, the virus will still circulate like other communicable diseases.

This guide provides information for employers to develop a communicable disease plan. An effective plan includes ongoing measures to reduce the risk of communicable disease and additional measures for when there's an elevated risk of communicable disease.

> Managing communicable disease at your workplace is part of an effective occupational health and safety program.

Communicable disease prevention

A *communicable disease* is an illness caused by an infectious agent or its toxic product that can be transmitted in a workplace from one person to another. Examples of communicable disease that may circulate in a workplace include COVID-19, norovirus, and seasonal influenza.

This guide describes a four-step process to help employers develop a communicable disease plan. This plan does not need to be written, posted, or approved by WorkSafeBC. Your plan may be supported by policies, signage, or other materials as appropriate to your workplace and the level of risk.

Step 1: Understand the risk

Preventing communicable disease involves taking ongoing measures to reduce the risk of communicable disease transmission in your workplace. It also involves implementing additional measures when advised to do so by Public Health during periods of elevated risk.

The level of risk of certain communicable diseases, including COVID-19, may increase from time to time or on a seasonal basis. This may occur at a local or regional level, or within a certain workplace.

☐ Monitor and review communicable disease-related information issued by your regional medical health officer or the provincial health officer if it's related to your industry, region, or workplace. This includes orders, guidance, notices, and recommendations issued by a medical health officer or the provincial health officer.

Step 2: Implement measures, practices, and policies to reduce the risk

Ongoing measures — Maintain at all times

As an employer, you must implement and maintain the following measures at all times.

☐ Implement policies to support staff who have symptoms of a communicable disease (e.g., fever or chills, coughing, diarrhea) so they can avoid being at the workplace when sick.

☐ Provide hand-hygiene facilities with appropriate supplies (see section 4.85 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation). Use policies and signage to remind workers to wash their hands regularly and to cover coughs and sneezes.

☐ Maintain a clean environment through routine cleaning processes that are appropriate for your industry and work practices.

☐ Make sure building ventilation is adequate and ventilation systems are properly maintained

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and functioning as designed. For more information, see section 4.72 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.

- [ ] Support employees in receiving vaccinations for COVID-19 and other vaccine-preventable conditions.

Additional measures — Implement as advised by Public Health

During a period of elevated risk, the medical health officer or provincial health officer will provide information and guidance about the risk and how you can reduce it. The measures that you'll need to implement will depend on the type of disease and the methods of transmission.

- [ ] Follow all direction from medical health officers and your regional health authority.

- [ ] Follow all orders, guidance, recommendations, and notices issued by the provincial health officer that are relevant to your industry, region, or workplace.

- [ ] Depending on the guidance that public health officials provide, you may need to assess the workplace to identify areas, activities, and processes that may pose a risk to workers. You may also need to implement appropriate control measures to reduce the risk, following the direction of Public Health. WorkSafeBC has maintained key COVID-19 protocols that you can refer to. You can use these as appropriate and as advised by Public Health during periods of increased risk.

Step 3: Communicate measures, practices, and policies

Make sure everyone entering the workplace, including workers from other employers, receives information about your measures, practices, and policies for managing communicable disease.

- [ ] Ensure all workers understand the measures in place at your workplace.

- [ ] Provide all your workers with information on policies for staying home when sick and working from home. The following resources are available for employers to support workers working from home:

  - Working from home: A guide to keeping your workers healthy and safe

  - Setting up, organizing, and working comfortably in your home workspace

- [ ] Post signage in your workplace to support the measures you have in place.

- [ ] Make sure your supervisors are knowledgeable about your measures, practices, and policies, and incorporate these into supervision practices at the workplace.

- [ ] Provide information, signage, and materials to workers in a language they understand.

- [ ] Be mindful that some aspects of managing communicable disease in the workplace may raise privacy and confidentiality issues. Seek advice on these issues as necessary.

Step 4: Monitor your workplace and update your plan as necessary

Continuously evaluate and update your plan to reflect changing risk levels and work practices.

- [ ] Use workplace inspections and ongoing supervision in the workplace to ensure measures are functioning properly, followed, and maintained.

- [ ] Monitor the guidance, notices, orders, and recommendations from Public Health (as required in Step 1). Adjust your plan as necessary.

- [ ] Monitor your workplace and risk level. Change your measures, practices, and policies as necessary.

- [ ] Update your plan to reflect changes in your workplace, including work processes, staff, and premises.

- [ ] Make sure workers know how to raise health and safety concerns.

- [ ] When identifying and resolving safety issues, involve joint health and safety committees or worker health and safety representatives (or, in smaller workplaces, other workers).

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