

Communicable disease prevention

A guide for employers

March 28, 2022

This guide is not meant for workplaces that are required to 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. Some employers may benefit from documenting their plan to assist in planning and communicating their communicable disease prevention measures, practices, and policies. A template is provided at the end of this guide for that purpose.

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 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. A template is provided at the end of this guide that employers may find useful for this purpose.

- ✓ 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.

- ✓ **Joint health and safety committees** and worker representatives play an important role in identifying and resolving workplace health and safety issues. When identifying and resolving safety issues, involve joint health and safety committees or worker health and safety representatives (or, in smaller workplaces, other workers).
- ✓ 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

Communicable disease prevention planning template

The following template may be useful for employers in documenting and communicating their communicable disease prevention measures, practices, and policies. This is an optional resource, and may be used or adapted as suited to the individual employer.

Step 1: Understand the risk

Preventing communicable disease involves taking ongoing measures to reduce the risk for communicable disease transmission in the workplace.

The principal is responsible for regularly monitoring and reviewing the communicable disease-related information that is provided by the regional medical health officer for Vancouver Coastal Health and the Provincial Health Officer. This includes all the orders, guidelines, notices, and recommendations that are issued by them. In addition, we follow the guidelines that are provided by the CISVA Superintendent. This information is regularly communicated to staff and parents to understand and minimize risk for communicable disease transmission in our school.

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

Ongoing measures

Implement policies to support staff who have symptoms of communicable disease so they can avoid being in the workplace when sick.

Policies to support staff who have symptoms of a communicable disease are in place so staff members can avoid being at the workplace when sick. These include CISVA Policy 310, Employee Leaves of Absence. All staff members are required to complete a daily health check to ensure they are fit for work and are reminded of this regularly. Any staff members who develop symptoms while at school will be relieved of their duties so that they can go home. Accommodations will be made for any workers who may be required to work from home. If students develop symptoms of illness, they will be removed from class and relocated to a supervised area away from others. Parents will be called and asked to pick up their child as soon as possible. All visitors to the school are required to complete a health check and ensure they follow all the procedures, measures and protocols that are in place. Positive messaging about vaccinations will be used, and staff members will be supported in receiving vaccines and given time off if needed to obtain them. Staff will adhere to room limits for staff-only spaces in school (e.g. staff room, photocopy room). Whole-staff meetings will be held in the gym to allow for adequate spacing. Classroom and learning environment configurations and activities that best meet learner needs and preferred educational approaches will be used. Students and staff will be reminded about respecting the personal space of others. Available space will be used to spread people out in learning environments and for gatherings. Students will be reminded to avoid crowding in stairwells and hallways, and parents will be reminded to avoid crowding at pick-up. Extracurricular events will be in line with those permitted as per relevant local, regional, provincial, and federal health recommendations and orders.

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

The following resources may be of use to employers in communicating appropriate practices around the workplace:

- **Prevent the spread of communicable disease: Handwashing**
- **Prevent the spread of communicable disease: Cover coughs and sneezes**

Adequate hand-washing facilities are available, and touchless faucets are in use in all sinks in the school and gym. Hand sanitizer dispensers are available at the main entrance and the entrance to the gym, at each classroom door, and outside the office, photocopy room and staff room. Adequate supplies of soap, paper towels and hand sanitizer are on hand. Signs are posted throughout the school to remind people to wash hands, to cover coughs and sneezes, and to maintain physical distance. The decision to wear a mask or face covering is a personal choice for staff, students, and visitors. A person's choice will be supported and respected. Extra masks are available at the entrance to the building and in classrooms and common areas for those who have forgotten theirs but would like to wear one or for those who become ill at school.

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

A clean environment will be maintained through routine cleaning processes. The school janitor cleans and disinfects washrooms and high-touch surfaces twice daily, and all other surfaces once daily and when visibly dirty. Other cleaning occurs in line with regular practices. Garbage containers are emptied once daily. The principal communicates regularly with the janitor and keeps him informed of any changes to guidelines. The janitor monitors cleaning supplies and orders new supplies as needed. School staff is responsible for cleaning any common items (e.g. library table and chairs, appliances in staff room) after use. If the bodily fluids of a person displaying symptoms come into contact with any surfaces, those areas will be cleaned and disinfected by the staff member attending to the sick person.

Make sure building ventilation is adequate and ventilation systems are properly maintained and functioning as designed. For more information, see section 4.72 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.

For employers without ventilation, or without direct control of their building's ventilation system, they may take other measures to improve air circulation, including opening windows.

Learn more here:

Prevent the spread of communicable disease: Ventilation and air circulation.

A make-up air (MUA) unit is in use in the school, and it is serviced regularly. Windows will be open whenever possible. Ceiling fans will be used if present in classrooms. If other fans are used, they will be used in ventilated spaces, with air moved from high to low. Classes will be taken outside regularly, and student recess and lunch breaks will be spent outside. The health and safety team, staff, and Parish Education Committee maintenance person are familiar with the "Prevent the spread of communicable disease: Ventilation and air circulation" document. This document will be reviewed regularly, and related decisions will be documented. The principal will do regular walk-throughs to ensure that standards are being met.

Additional measures

During a period of elevated risk, a medical health officer or the 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.

When a medical or provincial health officer provides guidance or new information about a risk or how to reduce it, the health and safety team will be assembled to discuss risk and establish plans and steps for response and implementation. Depending on the severity of risk, formal meetings with stakeholder groups will be conducted. Consultation with the CISVA Superintendent's Office will occur as needed. Plans will be documented. If needed, we will create a report-out strategy to all stakeholders (students, staff, parents, Parish Education Committee, parish) for additional measures. Email communication will be used to quickly contact stakeholders who are not on site. In the case of communication with staff, the phone tree may be used.

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.

To ensure that everyone entering our school receives information about our measures, practices, and policies:

- all employees have been provided with information on Policy 310 (Employee Leaves of Absence) and reminders about doing a daily health check
- parents are reminded regularly via email about their responsibility to check their children's health every day and not send students to school if exhibiting symptoms (health check links available on school website)
- health check signs for visitors are posted on doors to school and gym
- signs are posted throughout the school to support the measures we have in place (using proper hand hygiene, covering coughs and sneezes, maintaining physical distance)
- the principal regularly reminds staff about the practices in place at the school and monitors communication from the Ministry of Education, the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, FISA and the CISVA Superintendent's Office to keep people abreast of any changes in guidelines.

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

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

The principal and head teacher meet regularly to evaluate the measures, practices and policies in place. Walk-throughs are done regularly by the principal to ensure that measures are functioning properly, followed, and maintained. The principal checks in regularly with the janitor. COVID-19 is a standing item on the general staff meeting agenda so that staff members can be involved in ongoing evaluation. Staff members are encouraged to share any concerns with the principal, either in staff meetings or in private. Any concerns raised will be followed up and reported back on. Guidance, notices, orders and recommendations from Public Health will be monitored, and plans will be adjusted as necessary.