

Expedited Workplace Closure Order and WorkSafeBC

COVID-19 – BULLETIN

April 13, 2021

RELEASE DATE APRIL 13, 2021

Last Thursday, April 8, 2021, Dr Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s Provincial Health Officer, and Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, released a statement announcing that due to increasing COVID-19 cases, a Public Health Order is to be issued which will allow WorkSafeBC to expedite the closure of a workplace with a known COVID-19 outbreak. This order is in effect as of yesterday, Monday, April 12, 2021.

AS OF APRIL 13, 2021:

*This bulletin is current to the morning of **April 13, 2021**. Please note that while we continue to monitor the situation, the circumstances remain fluid as legislative and government rules and policies are ever changing. The responses of federal and provincial governments will continue to evolve and may impact the accuracy of the information in this bulletin. Furthermore, the information contained hereinunder is subject to revision with the introduction of new or additional government guidelines.*

New Public Health Order: WorkSafeBC's Role in Expedited Workplace Closures

Throughout the pandemic, workplaces have been sites of COVID-19 transmission and exposure. As a response, a new public health order will enable WorkSafeBC inspectors to work with public health to support businesses when a COVID-19 outbreak occurs at the workplace. The new public health order will expedite temporary closures when three or more employees have tested positive for COVID-19 and transmission has been confirmed at the workplace. Under this order, WorkSafeBC will be empowered to issue a closure order of 10 or more days.

WorkSafeBC's role will be to serve closure notices and act to support the business in reviewing and enhancing their COVID-19 Safety Plan. A list of workplaces that have been closed and the date of their reopening will be posted on the health authorities' website. Contact tracing and B.C.'s COVID-19 Immunization Plan will continue to be under Public Health's direction.

In the case of complex workplaces (e.g., large construction sites), the closure may be restricted to those parts of the workplace where transmission has occurred.

Public health will also assess whether there is an overriding public interest to keep the workplace open. This would apply to such locations as police stations, fire halls, health-care facilities, schools, shelters, the ferry system, public transportation and distribution hubs of necessary goods such as food and medicine, pharmacies and grocery stores.

As of today's date, the Public Health Order has not yet been released, but will be available on the following government page once available, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>.

What do Employers need to do?

Employers must ensure that they have a developed and robust COVID-19 Safety Plan in place. This plan should outline policies, response procedures, and preventative measures that have been put in place to mitigate the risks of transmission within the workplace. The policies and guidelines set out within the plan should be guided by a thorough risk assessment of the workplace. Workers, joint health and safety committees and supervisors should be involved in identifying risks, developing and maintaining protocols, and should continuously be encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the plan.

Industry specific guidelines, BCCDC recommendations and best practices, as well as Public Health Orders should all be consulted within the preparation of your COVID-19 Safety Plan. Plans should be posted in the workplace and on your website. Employers should also be prepared to speak to and present the plan and steps that have been taken to protect the workforce during a WorkSafeBC inspection. For more information and guidance on the requirements of your COVID-19 Safety Plan and industry specific guidelines, please visit WorkSafeBC's website at [Industry-specific information - WorkSafeBC](#).

Employers should conduct periodic reviews of their COVID-19 Safety Plans to ensure that controls in place are adequate, including in cases where a confirmed or suspected exposure occurred at the workplace.

WorkSafeBC notes that officers may call or visit unannounced to evaluate how you are protecting your workers and how you are applying the appropriate safeguards to properly manage the overall risk of COVID-19 exposures.

Ensure your Workplace is Ready:

- Review WorkSafeBC's COVID-19 Safety Plan requirements to ensure your workplace's measures and plan are in compliance.
- Review BCCDC recommendations and Public Health Orders to confirm that your workplace is following appropriate preventative measures and best practices in mitigating the risk of COVID-19 transmission amongst your workers.
- Confirm that your workplace has protocols in place, outlining the steps to be taken by management in situations that may occur including cases of symptomatic employees in the workplace, close contacts, and positive COVID-19 cases.
- Daily health checks and employee's self-assessment of COVID-19 symptoms should be conducted before employees enter the workplace.
- Work from home arrangements should be implemented whenever feasible.
- Ensure that you COVID-19 Safety Plan is posted within the workplace and on your website.

- Confirm that your COVID-19 Safety Plan and preventative measures have been appropriately communicated to employees (including signage throughout the workplace), and that they are being followed.
- Encourage workers to provide feedback as to whether preventative measures are effective, achievable, and applicable to their work and the workplace.
 - Work with staff to resolve any areas of concern.

For more information on reviewing and updating your COVID-19 safety plan and a guide for employers please visit [WorkSafeBC](#).

WorkSafeBC Inspections and What to Expect

WorkSafeBC officers may call or visit unannounced to evaluate how you are protecting your workers and how you are applying the appropriate safeguards to properly manage the overall risk of COVID-19 exposures. Most COVID-19 Inspections will take place on-site, though in some circumstances may be conducted remotely (by telephone or online conference).

During an investigation, a WorkSafeBC prevention officer will attend or remotely contact a workplace to meet with the employer and worker representative to confirm a COVID-19 Safety Plan is in place.

On-site inspections will involve officers touring the worksite to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. In both on-site and remote inspections, employers will be asked to provide details regarding how the plan was developed, the protocols in place, the involvement of the workforce in the development and monitoring of the plan, as well as how the plan was communicated and what training took place.

After completing the inspection, prevention officers will issue an Inspection Report with orders to employers in cases where improvements to COVID-19 Safety Plans and protocols are required. In cases of continued non-compliance, other enforcement measures, such as citations, may be considered and applied as required.

For further information on what to expect from a WorkSafeBC inspection, visit their information page to access the FAQs resource at [WorkSafeBC](#).

*Please note that this information bulletin is current to **April 13, 2021**. As this situation is evolving rapidly, we urge you to remain informed to the greatest extent you can. To understand how the information contained in this bulletin might apply in the context of your particular business or operation, please do not hesitate to contact us.*

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