

Health professions: Protocols for returning to operation

The following content was posted to WorkSafeBC's website on June 19, 2020. For the most current version, please visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

These protocols provide guidance to regulated health professions in community based clinic settings, as well as non-regulated health occupations such as kinesiologists, registered respiratory therapists, and polysomnography technologists. Those professions covered under the *Health Professions Act* may have additional obligations around clinical care prescribed by their professional college. Links to applicable professional colleges are provided under Additional Resources below.

Employers may also benefit from reviewing protocols for in-person counselling and office spaces. Employers must also ensure they are abiding by any relevant orders, notices, or guidance issued by the provincial health officer and the health authority relevant to their workplace.

Developing a COVID-19 safety plan

Employers are required to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Employers must involve frontline workers, joint health and safety committees, and supervisors in identifying protocols for their workplace.

The COVID-19 Safety Plan follows the six steps outlined on COVID-19 and returning to safe operation. You can also refer to the COVID-19 Safety Plan OHS Guideline for information about developing a safety plan, including the level of detail required and use of supporting documentation.

Employers are not required to submit plans to WorkSafeBC for approval, but in accordance with the order of the provincial health officer, this **plan must be posted** at the worksite and on their website, if they have one. During a WorkSafeBC inspection, we will ask employers about the steps they have taken to protect their workers or to see the plan if it has been developed.

One part of developing your COVID-19 Safety Plan is identifying protocols that everyone at the workplace must follow to keep workers safe. We've provided industry-specific protocols below to consider as you develop the plan for your workplace.

These protocols are not a list of requirements; however, they should be considered and implemented to the extent that they address the risks your workplace. You may need to identify and implement additional protocols if the protocols suggested here do not sufficiently address the risk to your workers.

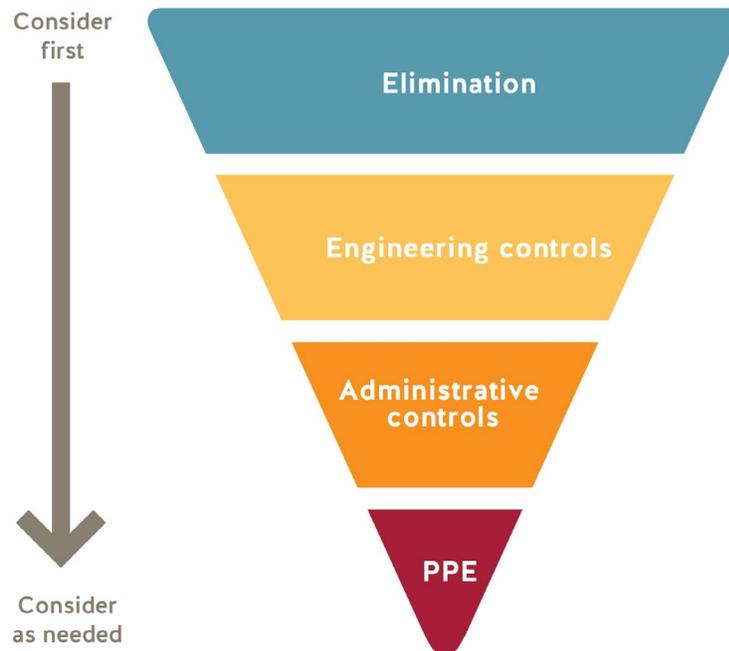
Understanding the risk

The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads in several ways, including through droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, and from touching a contaminated surface before touching the face. Higher risk situations require adequate protocols to address the risk.

- The risk of person-to-person transmission is increased the closer you come to other people, the amount of time you spend near them, and the number of people you come near. Physical distancing measures help mitigate this risk.
- The risk of surface transmission is increased when many people contact same surface, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Effective cleaning and hygiene practices help mitigate this risk.

Selecting protocols for your workplace

Note that different protocols offer different protection. Wherever possible, use the protocols that offer the highest level of protection and add additional protocols as required.



First level protection (elimination): Use policies and procedures to keep people at a safe physical distance from one another. Limit the number of people in your workplace at any one time, and implement protocols to keep workers at least 2 metres from other workers, customers, and members of the public.

Second level protection (engineering controls): If you can't always maintain physical distancing, install barriers such as plexiglass to separate people.

Third level protection (administrative controls): Establish rules and guidelines, such as cleaning protocols, telling workers to not share tools, or implementing one-way doors or walkways.

Fourth level protection (PPE): If the first three levels of protection aren't enough to control the risk, consider the use of masks. Ensure masks are selected and cared for appropriately and that workers are using masks correctly.

Protocols for health professions

Hygiene, cleaning, and disinfection

- Ensure adequate hand washing facilities are available, and provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers approved by Health Canada (DIN or NPN number).
- Encourage staff and clients to practice hand hygiene upon entering and exiting the clinic.
- Identify all common areas (e.g., washrooms, lunchrooms) and high contact surfaces (e.g., door handles, stair rails) and develop and implement a cleaning and disinfection schedule and associated procedures.
- Ensure shared equipment and facilities (e.g., telephones, computers, washrooms and laundry rooms) receive increased cleaning and sanitizing.
- Develop and implement protocols for sanitizing treatment areas and equipment to prevent surface transmission between clients.
- Provide staff training to ensure safe handling and effective application of cleaning products.

Modify staff areas and work flow

- Work remotely whenever possible.
- Develop and enforce policy that staff are to stay home when sick.
- Hold staff meetings virtually through use of teleconference or online meeting technology.
- Where in-person meetings are required, ensure staff members are positioned at least two metres apart.
- If work in the office/clinic is required, consider staggering start times or developing alternating schedules to reduce the number of people in the workplace at a given time.
- To minimize the number of co-workers that staff are interacting with, consider creating teams or groupings of workers and scheduling them to regularly work together.
- Prioritize the work that needs to occur at the workplace for you to offer your services.
- Arrange staff rooms and break rooms to adhere to physical distancing guidelines.
- Consider staggered break times to reduce employee gathering numbers.
- Minimize the shared use of workstations and equipment where possible.
- Consider implementing the requirement for staff to have dedicated work clothes and shoes. Provide a place for staff to safely store their street clothes while working and change in/out of clothes to prevent cross-contamination upon entry and exit from facility.
- Consider adjusting the general ventilation such as increasing the amount of outdoor air used by the system. Maintain the indoor air temperature and humidity at comfortable levels for building occupants.
- For additional considerations, refer Offices: Protocols for returning to operation.

Scheduling appointments and communicating with clients

- Determine how many clients can be within the clinic at a given time while maintaining at least two metres of physical distance. Do not book appointments above this number.
- In order to accommodate physical distancing, appointment times may need to be staggered.
- When speaking with clients during scheduling and appointment reminders, ask clients to consider:
 - » Rescheduling if they become sick, are placed on self-isolation, or have travelled out of the country within the last 14 days.
 - » Attending appointments alone where possible, and not bring friends or children.
- Consider emailing the client any forms that need to be filled out so clients can complete them prior to arriving at the clinic.
- Clinics with a website should consider posting information on modifications made to the location and appointment visit procedures.

Reception

- Post signage at the entrance of the clinic and within the clinic to assist with communicating expectations, such as hand hygiene, physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, reporting illness or travel history, occupancy limits and no entry if unwell or in self-isolation.
- Consider placing lines on the floor to mark a two metres distance from the reception desk.
- Consider use of a transparent barrier, such as a plexiglass shield around reception desk, when there is insufficient space to maintain two metre distance between staff and clients.
- Screen all clients when they check-in for their appointment by asking if they have symptoms associated with COVID-19, have been advised to self-isolate, or have travelled outside of Canada within the last 14 days. Clients that respond in the positive should be asked to leave and reschedule the appointment when deemed clinically appropriate.
- During transactions, if possible, limit the exchange of papers such as receipts.
- Where possible, payments should be accepted through contactless methods.

Waiting area

- Arrange the waiting area in a way that allows at least two metres of physical distance between each client. Consider removing extra chairs and coffee tables from the area to support this.
- Remove unnecessary items and offerings such as magazines, toys, candy, and beverages. Use disposable cups or single use items where necessary.
- Instruct clients to arrive no more than five minutes before their expected appointment.
- Where room size or layout presents challenges to physical distancing, consider alternative approaches, such as asking clients not to enter the clinic until they receive a text message or phone call to advise that their appointment can start.

Provision of health services

Professions covered under the *Health Professions Act* may have additional obligations around clinical care prescribed by their professional college. See the section below for links to those professional colleges.

- Conduct appointments virtually where clinically appropriate.
- Conduct a point of care assessment for risk of COVID-19 for every client interaction.

- Health services should not be performed on ill or symptomatic clients, if that is clinically appropriate.
- Where the client requires timely treatment, ensure PPE is used in accordance with BCCDC guidance.
- When possible, the worker should position themselves at least 2 metres from the client. Where physical distancing cannot be maintained:
 - » Consider the use of barriers if appropriate for the configuration of the workplace and the type of clinical services being rendered
 - » Where barriers are not practicable, consider the use of masks to reduce the risk of transmission. Ensure that masks are selected and cared for appropriately and that workers are using masks correctly. If the type of mask used does not offer adequate protection to the wearer, clients should also be encouraged to wear masks to protect workers.
 - » Note that health professions covered under the *Health Professions Act* may have guidelines around personal protective equipment (PPE) from their professional college that differ from this guidance. In these cases, the guidelines issued by the professional college take precedence and must be followed.
- Consider treating only one client at a time to minimize risks associated with moving between two or more patients.
- Where shared treatment areas exist, ensure clients are positioned at least 2 metres apart and shared equipment is cleaned and disinfected between uses by clients.
- Wherever possible, each employee should use their own products. If products are shared, they must be cleaned and disinfected between uses.
- Practice effective hand hygiene after each client by washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer approved by Health Canada (DIN or NPN number).
- Where feasible, workers should avoid sharing equipment or treatment rooms. Treatment rooms should be allocated to a single worker per shift.

Preparing for next appointment/end of day

- Ensure waiting and treatment areas and, equipment are sanitized to prevent surface transmission between clients.
- Commonly touched surfaces and shared equipment must be cleaned and disinfected after contact between individuals, even when not visibly soiled.
- Towels or any other items contacting a client are to be discarded or laundered between each use.
- Change into a separate set of street clothes and footwear before leaving work.
- Work clothing should be placed in a bag and laundered after every shift.
- Shower immediately upon returning home after every shift.

Documentation and training

- Provide your staff information on the risk of exposure to COVID-19 and the signs and symptoms of the disease.
- Provide instructions to workers on methods for maintaining physical distance, such as not greeting others by hugging or shaking hands.
- Train your staff on changes you've made to work policies, practices, and procedures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Keep records of that training.

- Workers must be trained on donning, using and doffing PPE. See information regarding use of PPE.
- Provide up-to-date information on public health officer orders and guidance. Consider daily safety meetings with staff to disseminate any new information. Document these meetings.
- Train your staff on how to report an exposure to COVID-19.
- Ensure a process is in place for employees to report concerns and for employers to address them, and that worker reps or joint health and safety committees are in place where required.
- Keep training records for staff. Examples of training records may include:
 - » Donning, using, and doffing personal protective equipment
 - » Training on safe work procedures
 - » N95 respirator fit testing (where applicable)

Links to health professional colleges

See the following links for additional information, guidance, or resources that may assist you in the development of your plan.

- BC College of Nursing Professionals
- College of Chiropractors of BC
- College of Dental Hygienists of BC
- College of Dental Surgeons of BC
- College of Dental Technicians of BC
- College of Denturists of BC
- College of Dietitians of BC
- College of Massage Therapists of BC
- College of Midwives of BC
- College of Naturopathic Physicians of BC
- College of Occupational Therapists of BC
- College of Opticians of BC
- College of Optometrists of BC
- College of Pharmacists of BC
- College of Physical Therapists of BC
- College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC
- College of Podiatric Surgeons of BC
- College of Psychologists of BC
- College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of BC
- College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of BC

For more information

The information on this page is based on current recommendations and may change. For the latest guidance, please see the health information from the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control and the latest news from the government of British Columbia.

If you have a question or concern

Workers and employers with questions or concerns about workplace exposure to COVID-19 can call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland (toll-free within B.C. at 1.888.621.SAFE). You'll be able to speak to a prevention officer to get answers to your questions, and if required, a prevention officer will be assigned to assess the health and safety risk at your workplace.

Translated resources

Our key COVID-19 related resources are also available in Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), French, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese.