

Real estate:

Protocols for returning to operation

The following content was posted to WorkSafeBC's website on May 22, 2020. For the most current version, please visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

These protocols are for those providing services related to real estate, including real estate professionals and home inspectors. These employers may also benefit from reviewing protocols related to [office space](#). Employers must also ensure they are abiding by any [orders, notices, or guidance issued by the provincial health officer](#), and the appropriate health authority, which are 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. This plan follows the six steps outlined on [COVID-19 and returning to safe operation](#). Employers must involve frontline workers, joint health and safety committees, and supervisors in identifying protocols for their workplace. You do not need a formal plan in place to begin operation, but are expected to develop it while protecting the safety of your workers.

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. 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.

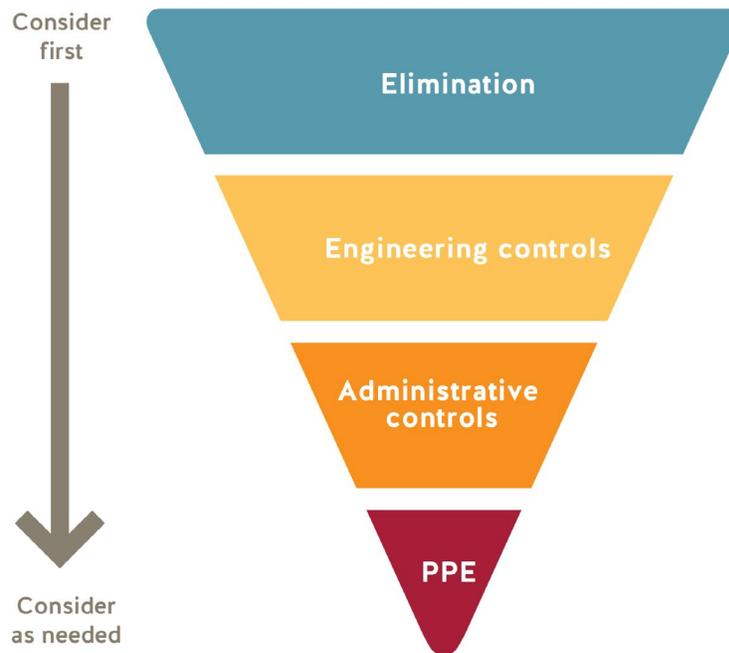
Understanding the risk

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 **non-medical masks**. Be aware of the limitation of non-medical masks to protect the wearer from respiratory droplets. Ensure workers are **using masks appropriately**.

Protocols for real estate

Provide virtual services

- Whenever possible, real estate professionals should continue to correspond with clients and potential buyers through email, telephone, or video/teleconference. Use technology to draft and execute any written service agreements, or standard forms including electronic signatures for documents.
- Offer virtual viewings or virtual open houses where possible. Virtual viewings offer an effective means to narrowing down the number of properties to show; thereby limiting meeting potential buyers in person and reducing the risk of cross contamination. Virtual showings should not replace

viewing the home where the buyer is making a purchasing decision.

- Provide potential buyers with online access to property documents including strata documents, market research, community development documents, etc.

In-person viewings

- If a virtual viewing is not possible or practicable, establish a set of protocols and communicate them to all people involved prior to attending a viewing (e.g., real estate professionals, viewers, and current occupants).
- Develop a policy prohibiting anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 from attending in-person viewings. Advise clients who have booked appointments that they must cancel if they develop symptoms. Policies may also cover those who are under order by the public health officer to self-isolate due to international travel or known exposure to COVID-19.
- Post signage at the property promoting the proper physical distancing requirement.
- Provide additional handwashing facilities (e.g., hand wash bottles with soap or hand sanitizer) at the front door and ask visitors to wash their hands before entering.
- To help maintain the safety of consumers, clients, and colleagues, real estate professionals should make their best attempt to refrain from showing multiple properties in a single day to help minimize cross-contamination.
- Where possible, real estate professionals may wish to stay in one location of a property during viewing to reduce the risk of physical contact with potential buyers.
- If possible, conduct viewings by appointment only to reduce the number of people on the property.
- If more than one party will be viewing the property at the same time, consider some of the following measures:
 - » Review the property floor plan and determine the route through the home that will best enable physical distancing.
 - » Anticipate areas of property where physical distancing cannot be maintained (e.g., hallways, small rooms, closets,). Consider blocking off some areas if necessary.
 - » Consider limiting the total number of people who can be viewing the property.
 - » Consider limiting the number of people in each area of the building (i.e., by room or by floor) at one time.
- Where a viewing location may not be apparent, real estate professionals should meet buyers outside of a complex and/or building to minimize unnecessary wandering around the viewing location or unit. Considerations for the physical distancing requirement should be applied.
- Where possible, real estate professionals should schedule a tour of building amenities (such as on-site gym, pool, etc.) with the strata management company to prevent physical contact with residents.
- Where multiple parties are involved and a meeting cannot be conducted virtually, hold meetings outside or in a large space to maintain physical distancing.
- Meet buyers at viewing location(s) and do not drive potential buyers to property locations.
- Do not shake hands with clients.
- With the permission of clients and consumers and where practicable, document names and contact information of all people attending a property viewing in accordance with all privacy policies.

Other considerations

- For occupied properties, request that the occupants are not present during viewings. This applies to pets in the dwelling (e.g., dogs, cats). At minimum, pets should be restricted to another area of the dwelling.
- If possible, request that current occupants or landlord disinfect frequently touched surfaces prior to any viewings. This includes lockboxes as a high-touch surface. WorkSafeBC has guidance around effective [cleaning and disinfecting](#) that can be provided to anyone carrying out these tasks.
- Wash your hands using [good hygiene practices](#) after touching common items.
- Ensure that handling of property keys are coordinated so that physical contact is not required.
- Avoid the sharing of pens, pencils, and other office stationary. Any sign-ins should be done electronically to prevent touching documents or sharing pens.

Hygiene protocols

- Implementing hand hygiene practices and avoiding face touching with unwashed hands can prevent infection transmission. Wash hands before and after breaks or meeting clients and after viewings, even in the absence of physical contact. Refer to WorkSafeBC guidance on effective [handwashing protocols](#).
- People attending viewing(s), including real estate professionals, may choose to wear non-surgical safety equipment such as masks and shoe covers, and have these items readily available upon entering the property. Sellers may require this as a condition of entry to the home. Refer to WorkSafeBC guidance on the [selection and use of masks](#).
- If possible, viewing attendees should avoid using the property's washrooms. If used, washrooms should be cleaned and disinfected at least once daily. Real estate professionals can discuss this with the seller and determine what is practicable.
- Ensure all attendees in the home practice good respiratory etiquette by covering mouth and nose with the crease of their elbow or with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing.

Disinfection protocol and considerations for offices and homes

- All common areas and surfaces should be disinfected at the start and end of each day. Examples of common areas include washrooms, shared offices, common tables, lockboxes, light switches, handrails, door handles, and keys. Consider touchless alternatives, as practicable, and discuss with sellers. Refer to WorkSafeBC guidance on [cleaning and disinfecting protocols](#).
- Ask sellers or occupants to prepare for viewings by turning on all lights and opening doors to prevent touching of surfaces by potential buyers.
- Real estate professionals should schedule viewings that allow for adequate time to disinfect high touch surfaces and allow for air flow throughout the property. This can be coordinated with the parties involved.
- Where use of an elevator is required, stagger its use to adhere to the physical distancing requirement. Consider using stairs as an alternate to elevators.
- Stand back from entering while waiting for elevator doors to open and enter elevators one by one to avoid crowding.

Home inspection protocols

In addition to the protocols listed below, the Home Inspectors Association BC (HIABC) has published

industry-specific guidelines for home inspection during the COVID-19 pandemic. HIABC home inspectors are encouraged to follow these guidelines as part of their overall COVID-19 Safety Plan:

- Inform all parties involved that COVID-19 inspection guidelines will be used and communicate those guidelines to prevent issues on the day of the inspection.
- Conduct a pre-screening assessment to determine the level of risk (e.g., consider occupants who may have travelled recently, experienced any symptoms, or contacted anyone exposed to COVID-19).
- If there is concern raised during the pre-screening assessment, reschedule the home inspection to a later date (i.e., after 14 days and disinfection of potentially contaminated surfaces within the dwelling).
- Reschedule home inspection if any occupants develop symptoms or is presumed and/or confirmed to have COVID-19.
- If possible, conduct the home inspection alone or limit those present so that physical distancing protocols can be maintained.
- Prior to a home inspection, request that occupants provide clear and unobstructed access to the windows, heating equipment, water heater, electrical panel, and attic access hatch, etc.
- Following the inspection, disinfect all equipment and/or tools that were used during the home inspection, including phone, inside footwear (if used), key and lockbox, and any other items used during home inspection.
- Collect used wipes, gloves, and any other disposable items used during the inspection and dispose of the waste upon leaving the home inspection.
- If possible, provide information virtually to minimize physical contact (e.g., email post inspection reports, answer questions over the telephone and/or video chat, use of virtual signatures if required)
- Complete payment for home inspection virtually or over the phone to avoid cash transactions.

Additional resources

- [Home Inspectors Association BC \(HIABC\)](#)
- [Real Estate Council of British Columbia](#)
- [BC Real Estate Association - guidance on COVID-19](#)

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.

Resources

COVID-19: A guide to reducing the risk

This resource is for employers, outlining the steps to follow to make sure you are minimizing the risk of COVID-19 so your business can operate safely.

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. This tool will guide...

Help prevent the spread of COVID-19: Cover coughs and sneezes

This poster reminds workers and visitors to cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, and to wash their hands afterward.

[See more resources](#)