



Small business owner Heather Jenkins and her employee Emily Strutinski maintain physical distance while working in a prep area.

Keeping your COVID-19 safety plan updated protects everyone

By Gord Woodward

B.C. employers are required to develop and follow a COVID-19 safety plan. It needs to outline their policies, guidelines, and procedures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Importantly, it also needs to be regularly updated.

Thanks to her COVID-19 safety plan, small business owner Heather Jenkins has kept her busy seafood shop open without any virus exposures during a year-long pandemic.

The owner of 1 Fish 2 Fish Fresh Seafood Market in Langley City made her plan early in the pandemic. She regularly updates it as conditions — and public health orders — evolve. As a result, she and nine employees have maintained operations seven days a week without interruption.

“We want to keep ourselves and our customers safe and comfortable,” says Jenkins. “We get a lot of comments from customers about how safe they feel in the store.”

Ron Schouten, a WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer, says Jenkins and her staff have been “totally proactive” in response to COVID-19. “They really looked into what the health and safety requirements were for their size of business and their industry,” he says.

That’s a necessary step for all employers. They need to have a [COVID-19 safety plan](#) tailored to their business. Success comes from implementing the plan, monitoring results, and updating safety precautions as needed.

Specific actions needed to reduce risks

Conducting a risk assessment is the first step in developing a plan. “Look for ways COVID-19 could spread in your business,” explains Schouten. “Look at areas where people gather, including easy-to-overlook spots like hallways and lunchrooms.”

Workers and supervisors need to be involved during the assessment. They know the workplace intimately

and can identify areas where congestion might occur, tasks that staff do in close proximity, equipment they share, and surfaces people touch.

At 1 Fish 2 Fish, the risks included COVID-19 exposure through physical proximity (droplets in the air) and surface contamination. The small shop welcomed anywhere from 40 to 150 customers a day, plus delivery people. Its young staff — ranging from 15 to 24 years of age — liked to socialize. They shared workstations, a washroom, and some equipment. The store's high-touch points included fridge and freezer doors, knives, and light switches.

The next step in developing a plan is implementing specific actions to reduce the risks. In her store, Jenkins limited the number of people allowed inside and requested one person per household to do the shopping. She mandated masks for employees and customers, and she opened a second cash on the other side of the store so customers didn't have to queue behind one another.

She also stepped up the cleaning routine. "We do it every hour or two every day," she says. Separate buckets are designated for use in the front and back of the shop. Staff wash or sanitize their hands and wear fresh gloves for every transaction.

Jenkins staggered schedules, too. "We use cohorts — certain staff that always work together. We're also keeping our jobs more separate." Where two people may have shared a table to pack lobster, for example, they now work apart. And, she adds, "We don't take breaks together anymore."

Communication, training key to plan's success

Clear policies, communication, and training are other essential elements of a COVID-19 safety plan. At 1 Fish 2 Fish, staff have their temperatures taken and do a health check before each shift. The plan is posted at the shop and on the company website.

Jenkins trains her staff in the safety protocols and supervises them to ensure the rules are followed. "I make sure they all know what we're doing, and I remind them, too," she says. She also asks for their input. "I've made sure they've had a voice," she says. "They see things through different eyes."

Employee Emma Treleavean appreciates the two-way communication. "We've been very in the loop," she

says. "Every day we talk about what's going on. Honestly, I feel really safe."

Schouten says employers need to educate workers about COVID-19 risks. "Make sure they have the information," he says. As for workers, "If you're not sure about something, or don't understand it, ask your employer."

An effective safety plan also needs regular updates, he adds. Employers need to monitor the workplace and adapt the plan to address any changes in operations. Adding curbside pickup, for example, could reduce the number of people in a store.

Jenkins monitors public health and WorkSafeBC guidance. When safety recommendations evolve, she incorporates the latest information into her plan. To keep up to speed, she frequently views the [COVID-19 page](#) on [worksafebc.com](#). "WorkSafeBC has been monumental," she says. The website provides the latest information as well as free templates for a safety plan and signage. "I found it so easy to navigate." 🙌



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