WorkSafeBC – COVID-19 safety plans to communicable disease prevention in the workplace

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British Columbia moved into Step 3 of the BC Restart Plan on July 1, 2021. One of the main implication for employers is a shift from COVID-19 safety plans to general communicable disease prevention. Last week, WorkSafeBC released its guidance on communicable disease prevention, and employers should begin adapting their COVID-19 safety plans to communicable disease prevention with this guidance in mind.

What is communicable disease prevention?

Like COVID-19, a communicable disease is any illness that starts from an infectious agent and can be transmitted among people. Therefore, communicable disease prevention requires employers to assess the risks that are present in the workplace, create a plan that incorporates the correct measures, and communicate these measures to their employees.

What are the workplace requirements to implement communicable disease prevention?

The workplace requirements for communicable disease prevention are based more generally in section 21 of the *Workers Compensation Act* (titled “General Duties of Employers, Workers and Others”).

Section 21 states that employers must ensure the health and safety of their employees (and any other employee present in that workplace), as well as comply with any applicable orders. This legal obligation now includes taking basic steps to reduce the risk to workers from communicable diseases and implementing additional measures to prevent transmission in times of elevated risk.

Communicable disease prevention requires ongoing measures that must be present at all times as well as additional measures when necessary (subject to Public Health advice) as described further below.

General measures

Ongoing measures for communicable disease prevention that employers **must** implement and communicate to their workers include the following:

- *Policies to support staff who get sick* – workers should not have to work if they are sick with a communicable disease;
- *Hand-hygiene policies/facilities* – basic hand hygiene facilities should be available to all workers, and reminders of hand hygiene should be encouraged;
- *Cleaning protocols* – the workplace must be cleaned regularly;
- *Ventilation* – the workplace must have ventilation that is operating correctly and is maintained; and
- *Supporting Vaccines* – employers must support workers to get vaccinated and be mindful to those who cannot or choose not to.

Additional measures

Employers must monitor and review the guidance published by Public Health and the BC Centre for Disease Control in addition to implementing any advised measures to the extent possible. Additional measures recommended by the provincial health officer should be implemented as advised.

Resources

WorkSafe BC has provided a guide to assist employers in developing a communicable disease prevention plan.

For more information on how WorkSafeBC's guidance on communicable disease prevention could impact you and your business please reach out to your BLG lawyer or one of the key contacts listed below.

*The author would like to thank **Maryama Elmi**, summer student, for co-authoring this text.*

By

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