



**Interior Health**  
*Every person matters*

# Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

## **Workplace Response to Employee Sickness or Positive COVID-19 Diagnosis**

**A Resource for Employers and Businesses**

**Version I  
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Adapted from: Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (updated Dec 01 2020)



# Workplace Response to Employee Sickness or Positive COVID-19 Diagnosis

## A Resource for Employers and Businesses

Sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts to protect ourselves and one another, an employee may fall ill to COVID-19. A positive diagnosis can be stressful for the employee and concerning to the employer and other staff. This resource explains the steps that Public Health takes when a person tests positive and the role that Public Health will play in assessing the risk of exposure at a workplace, as well as providing directions to the business to manage any exposure.

## What happens at Interior Health when a person tests positive for COVID-19?

Public Health will follow-up by phone with every person who tests positive for COVID-19. During the phone conversation, Public Health will:

- Inform the person they have tested positive for COVID-19
- Advise them of the need to [self-isolate](#) for a specified duration of time
- Interview them to determine how they may have been exposed to COVID-19
- Determine if there have been any close contacts that may be at increased risk of developing COVID-19 from exposure to the person
- Document the places they went while infectious (e.g. work, public places)
- Answer any questions the person may have
- Help make sure they receive any care they may require

## How does Public Health follow-up with close contacts?

If Public Health determines there are close contacts of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, each of those individuals will be contacted by phone, as well as anyone else deemed necessary to assess risk to others (e.g. employers).

During the initial phone conversation with close contacts, Public Health staff will:

- Confirm if they were a close contact, and if so,
- Advise them to self-isolate for 14 days following the last date of exposure to the case
- Provide information on how to [self-monitor for symptoms](#)
- Provide instructions on what to do if they [develop symptoms over the 14 days](#)
- Enroll them in the Active Daily Monitoring program so they will be called by Public Health on a pre-determined schedule, until the self-isolation period is over

**Note:** Contact tracing teams are working from many different areas across the province and their caller ID may bear the name Province of BC, or an Interior Health facility.



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## What happens if an employee who tests positive for COVID-19 was at work while they were infectious?

If a case was at work while infectious, Public Health will determine if the exposure posed a substantial risk to others.

Note: Not all cases result in exposures to others that require further contact tracing. A very brief interaction (e.g., walking past someone who tested positive) does not pose an increased risk. There is also no increased risk of exposure if the person was not at work while infectious.

Public Health may consult with the employer if additional information is needed related to the individual (e.g., to confirm their close contacts or to clarify details that the employee cannot provide) or if any other measures need to be taken by the workplace or staff to reduce the risk of transmission.

Note: Public Health is required by law to respect the privacy of the person infected and will issue a workplace notification letter to employees only if it is needed to manage the exposure risk to others that may have been in contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19.

## Should a business close if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?

In most cases, a business will not need to close unless they have been directed to do so by Public Health. Additional precautions may need to be taken, such as performing enhanced cleaning. Employers should work with Public Health to determine appropriate follow up measures.

## If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, should other employees self-isolate?

Other employees will not automatically be required to self-isolate when someone in their workplace tests positive for COVID-19.

During the contact tracing follow-up, Public Health conducts a detailed interview with the individual who has tested positive to determine if anyone is at increased risk of exposure.

Based on the findings of the interview, Public Health determines if anyone needs to be contacted and instructed to self-monitor or to self-isolate.



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## Are workers who test positive for COVID-19 expected to inform their employer?

Employees who test positive must not go to work until they have been cleared from isolation by Public Health. An employee who tests positive for COVID-19 will be given specific directions from Public Health, and in general will not be expected to inform their employer of their positive COVID-19 diagnosis. The employee should notify their employer that they will not be coming to work.

An employee who tests positive for COVID-19 may voluntarily inform their employer of their positive COVID-19 diagnosis before or after they have been contacted by Public Health. In this case, employers are encouraged to treat the individual in a respectful manner that protects the privacy of their worker.

## Should all other staff members be notified if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?

Employers are not automatically required to notify all other workers if a staff member tests positive for COVID-19. Public Health will contact those who need to self-isolate. Public Health will issue a workplace notification letter to employees if it is needed to manage the exposure risk to others that may have been in contact with someone with COVID-19.

While it is not necessary or recommended for COVID-19 prevention, an employer may also decide to notify other staff or visitors of the positive case within the workplace. In doing so, the employer is encouraged to keep in mind that it can be very stressful for a person to be diagnosed with COVID-19. Employers are encouraged to treat the individual in a respectful manner that protects the privacy of their worker.

**Note:** To avoid confusion, employers are strongly encouraged to discuss the scenario with Public Health before notifying other staff or customers.

## What happens if an employee gets sick while they are at work?

- If while at work, an employee starts experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness consistent with COVID-19, even if symptoms are mild, ask the employee to don a mask, to leave work immediately, go straight home, and contact their a family physician/primary care provider or Health Link BC at 8-1-1 for further guidance.
- Sick employees should use the [BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#).
- Anyone with symptoms can now be assessed and receive a COVID-19 test.
- Testing is not recommended for people who do not have symptoms.



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## Public Exposure Alerts

During contact tracing, our Public Health team does a thorough assessment of where the person has been during their infections period and if there was any risk of public exposure. Depending on the type of interactions a case has had, and the measures and safety plans in place at the time, we are often able to identify and notify all close contacts directly and determine there is no further risk. Public health only issues public exposure alerts if:

1. They've determined there was a risk of public exposure **and**
2. They're not able to contact everyone who may have been exposed

As a precaution, Interior Health maintains a list with the locations and times of known possible exposures to COVID-19 to the public in our region. The list is available to view at:

[news.interiorhealth.ca/news/public-exposures/](https://news.interiorhealth.ca/news/public-exposures/)

The possible exposures listed on this site are believed to be low risk but, out of an abundance of caution, Public Health asks anyone who may have visited any of the locations listed on the specified dates and times to [self-monitor for symptoms](#). There is no known risk to anyone who attended any listed locations outside of the specified dates and times.

If you remain healthy and do not develop symptoms, there is no need to self-isolate and you can continue with your usual daily activities.

If you have [symptoms related to COVID-19](#), however mild, please call your family doctor or 8-1-1, seek testing and then [self-isolate](#). Please call ahead and wear a mask when seeking testing.

## Cleaning and Disinfection

- Ensure that objects and surfaces touched by sick employees who have gone home are cleaned and disinfected before being used by others
- Follow the [BCCDC cleaning and disinfection](#) recommendations
- Clean dirty surfaces with soap and water before disinfecting them
- Use products on [Health Canada's list of hard-surface disinfectants](#) for use against SARS- CoV-2 (COVID-19)
- Follow the instructions on product labels to ensure safe and effective use of the product
- Wear additional personal protective equipment (PPE) as needed, depending on the setting and disinfectant product being used



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## Written Communication

Some businesses may choose to circulate their own written information either internally, or to the public. Communicate with empathy and authority. Consider including:

- The business continuity plan with next steps following a positive diagnosis
- What has been done to disinfect impacted spaces
- Any additional health and safety measures to be implemented
- Links to supports, counselling resources or any employee assistance programs

**Note:** Always direct employees to credible sources of information such as the BC Center for Disease Control, and provincial health authority websites for news and information.

## Sample Workplace Memo

### Important Update

The COVID-19 situation is evolving. Today we were notified that one of our staff has been confirmed with having the COVID-19 virus.

At this time, the employee is resting at home in self-isolation.

We are working closely with Interior Health to assist them with their investigation. They have stated < insert details here >.

We are taking all necessary precautions and we will continue to be honest with you, our employees, customers and the community.

We do know that COVID-19 is in our community, and so we encourage everyone to take precautions. Stay home if you are sick, wash your hands, and practice physical distancing when you go out. We are here for you during these difficult times.

STORE < name/location >

HOURS HAVE BEEN IMPACTED < new hours >

RESOURCES < insert details here >

Thank you,  
OWNER