

COVID –19 Conditions

Q: The novel coronavirus (now officially named COVID- 19) has dominated the media headlines lately. How does this virus compare to others like influenza (the flu)?

A: Influenza and COVID -19 are different viruses, but both can result in similar symptoms of fever, headache, cough, sore throat, runny nose. Symptoms in both cases can range in severity from mild to severe. Like influenza, some groups may be at increased risk for more severe illness-even death-such as older adults or those with underlying health conditions. Both illnesses are droplet-spread so preventative measures such as washing your hands; not touching your nose and mouth with your hands and covering up a cough/sneeze are effective methods.

Q: I am a supervisor and have an employee returning to work who recently visited other areas of China (not Hubei province). The worker is doing well health-wise and has no symptoms. Do I need to preclude them from work on a precautionary basis?

A: No. At this time, the BC Centre for Disease control has only made recommendations to self isolate and notify the local Medical Health Officer for those incoming travelers from Hubei province, China (14 days following last exposure, e.g. leaving affected area). However, the Public Health Agency of Canada does ask that for 14 day after the day they left mainland China to:

- monitor their health for fever, cough, and difficult breathing; and,
- avoid crowded public spaces and places where you cannot easily separate yourself from others if you become ill.

If symptoms develop, isolate yourself from others as quickly as possible. Immediately call a health care professional or local public health authority. They will provide advice on next steps.

Q: I have a co-worker who has returned from the Hubei province, China 12 days ago and is doing well without symptoms, do I need to self isolate myself for 14 days since I worked along side them?

A: Yes, it is possible you may be requested to self isolate. The new guidelines recommend that "people who have recently visited, or who have been in dose contact with someone who has recently visited the Hubei province in China, to call public health officials and self isolate for 14 days".

Q: What does "close contact" mean?

A: For public health monitoring, a close contact is defined as a person who:

- Provided care for the case, including healthcare workers, family members or other caregivers, or who had other similar close physical contact without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment, OR
- Who lived with or otherwise had close prolonged* contact (within 2 meters) with a probable or confirmed case while the case was ill, OR
- Had direct contact with the infectious body fluids of a probable or confirmed case (e.g. was coughed on or sneezed on) while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment.

*as part of the individual risk assessment, consider the duration of the contact's exposure (e.g. a longer exposure time likely increases the risk), the case's symptoms (coughing or severe illness likely increases exposure risk) and whether the exposure occurred in a health care setting.

Q: I supervise an employee who is sick with a fever and respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, runny nose). There is no travel history to Hubei/Wuhan and no history of exposure to someone who was ill and travelled to Hubei/Wuhan. What do I do with this employee?

A: If the employee is sick and unable to work, they can be placed on sick leave. The common cold or seasonal influenza is far more common than COVID-19, and employees should seek treatment advice from their health care provider.

Q: I have an employee traveling abroad where COVID -19 cases have been confirmed (e.g. other countries including China) and is returning to work soon. Should I be concerned about spread of the novel coronavirus?

A: It depends. Travelers returning through the airports will be screened at the airport. These individuals should/would be given advice at that time if precautions or isolation is required. You need to obtain more information from your employee including their health status: are they well or feeling sick? As well, China is a large country. Where in China did the employee travel? When were they last in Wuhan/Hubei?

Those travelling to China should check <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notice/210> for the latest information on novel coronavirus.

Regardless if the employee is sick or well, if the employee has travelled to Hubei province, China, see FAQ Q3 or been in close contact with someone who has recently visited the Hubei province in China, to call public health officials and self isolate for 14 days. The same applies if the employee has travelled to Iran-See also

As with any illness, if the employee experiences illness upon returning to Canada, they should contact their health care provider to co-ordinate next steps.

Q: An employee of ours has tested positive for COVID-19. What should we do?

A: You should send home all employees who worked closely with that employee for a 14-day period of time to ensure the infection does not spread. Before the employee departs, ask them to identify all individuals who worked in close proximity (three to six feet) with them in the previous 14 days to ensure you have a full list of those who should be sent home. When sending the employees home, do not identify by name the infected employee or you could risk a violation of confidentiality laws. You may also want to consider asking a cleaning company to undertake a deep cleaning of your affected workspaces. If you work in a shared office building or area, you should inform building management so they can take whatever precautions they deem necessary.

Q: One of our employees has a suspected but unconfirmed case of COVID-19. What should we do?

A: There is no easy way for you to make this determination, but you should let logic guide your thinking. The kinds of indicators that will lead you to conclude an illness could be a suspected but unconfirmed case of COVID-19 include whether that employee traveled to a restricted area that is under Travel

Advisory according to the BC Health Authority, whether that employee was exposed to someone who traveled to one of those areas, or similar facts. You should err on the side of caution but not panic.

Q: One of our employees self-reported that they came into contact with someone who had a presumptive positive case of COVID-19. What should we do?

A: Take the same precautions as noted above. Treat the situation as if the suspected case is a confirmed case for purposes of sending home potentially infected employees. Communicate with your affected workers to let them know that the employee is asymptomatic for the virus but you are acting out of an abundance of caution.

Q: If we learn or suspect that one of our employees has COVID-19, do we have a responsibility to report this information to the BC Health Authority

A: There is no obligation to report a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. The healthcare provider that receives the confirmation of a positive test result is a mandatory reporter who will handle that responsibility.

Q: Can an employee refuse to come to work because of fear of infection?

A: The threat must be immediate or imminent, which means that an employee must believe that death or serious physical harm could occur within a short time. Example being requiring travel to China or to work with patients in a medical setting without personal protective equipment at this time may rise to this threshold. Conditions in our setting, however, do not meet the elements required for an employee to refuse to work. Once again, this guidance is general, and employers must determine when this unusual state exists in your workplace before determining whether it is permissible for employees to refuse to work.

Q: Should I advise my staff to wear masks (surgical or N95 respirators) to protect them against exposure to unknown sources of COVID -19 in the office, or exposure to someone who has returned from China, e.g. a client, the general public, or a co-worker?

A: No. There has been no general recommendation for everyone to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as surgical masks and N95 respirators. The BC Centre for Disease Control has recommended the use of PPE in specific situations such as healthcare professionals involved with patient care and when collecting biological samples for testing. When sick, wearing a mask helps to prevent us from passing on illnesses to other people. But if you are not sick, we do not know if wearing a mask will prevent infection. People wearing a mask may also touch their faces more often, potentially increasing the risk of having the eyes, nose or mouth come into contact with the virus.

Q: I supervise an employee who tells me they have been medically advised to stay home as they are sick with a communicable disease (COVID -19). Are they eligible for sick leave?

A: Yes. If an employee has been advised by a medical professional to remain at home on self isolation because they are sick (or is in hospital for treatment), they are eligible for sick leave.

Q: Is there a vaccine for the COVID -19?

A: No, not at this time; however, researchers are working on it.

Q: If I have questions about COVID-19 or other communicable diseases who should I contact?

A: A new toll-free phone number (1-833 784 4397) has been established to answer general questions from Canadians about the 2019 (COVID -19). Service is available from 7am to midnight EST.

Anyone how is concerned they may have been exposed to or are experiencing symptoms of the COVID -19 should contact their primary care provider, local public health office or 811.

Q: If my employee is asymptomatic and feeling well enough to work, but has been medically recommended to self isolate for 14 days due to possible COVID- 19 exposure, what should I do?

A: The employee should maintain the self isolation recommendation for 14 days and not enter the workplace. Remote work can be considered by the supervisor provided this meets operational requirements.

Q: The employee I supervise is not sick and has no respiratory symptoms but has travelled to areas where there is a risk of the COVID- 19 virus. My employee would like to self quarantine for 14 days as they heard it may help keep others in the workplace safe in case they have contracted COVID 19 but don't show symptoms. What should I do?

A: Self quarantine has not been a recommendation for asymptomatic (no symptoms) individuals. The exception is individuals returning from Hubei Province, China and from Iran

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommends returning travellers, "monitor your health for fever, cough and difficulty breathing for 14 days after you arrive in Canada; if you do have these symptoms, call the public health authority (ie local public health).

Monitoring your health does not equate to self isolation. This is not sick leave

Q: The employee I supervise has been travelling abroad where there is a risk of coronaviruses exposure. They have read on websites that for 14 days after they arrive back in Canada that they should "avoid crowded public spaces and places where you cannot easily separate yourself from others if you become ill." The employee would like to self isolate at home for 14 days as a precaution and has submitted a ST02 certificate. What should I do?

A: If the employee is well and does not have symptoms. If the worker is sick, they should contact their health care provider, 8-1-1, or local public health authority for further instructions. Since they are sick, they may be eligible for sick leave benefits and can return to work when they are well and able to do so.

Q: I have an employee who will be coming back to work after recovering from an active COVID-19 infection. That employee feels well and is not having any further symptoms. What should I do?

A: Presently, all COVID-19 cases in BC are being medically followed by Public Health and are self-isolated from others. Once individuals recovering from COVID-19 infection have demonstrated they no longer require self isolation (two negative test samples), Public Health will advise these individuals they can return to their usual routines. Ask your employee if they have been medically cleared to return to work and have the employee provide a written note from their health care provider stating they are fit to return to work.

Q: I have an employee who was given a medical recommendation to self-isolate for 14 days as a precautionary measure for COVID-19. That employee is doing well, with no symptoms, and would like to return to work. What should I do?

A: Individuals who have been medically recommended by a health care professional to self-isolate, will be closely monitored for symptoms during their self-isolation and will have daily checklists to complete. At the end of the 14 days of self-isolation, and in the absence of symptoms, the health care provider/Public Health will end the 14-day self-isolation and the worker can return to their usual routines.

Ask your employee if they have been medically cleared to return to work and have the employee provide a written note from their health care provider stating they are fit to return to work.

Q: An employee I supervise is concerned about getting sick and does not want to work with a co-worker or client who is sick with a COVID-19 infection. What should I do?

Individuals (co-worker or clients) that have confirmed COVID -19 infection are being medically followed by Public Health. These individuals should be in self-isolation during their recovery until they no longer pose a health risk to others. If a co-worker or client is now in the workplace, they should be non-contagious and have received medical clearance to return to their usual routines. The concerned employee can continue to practice routine health measures including frequent hand washing, not touching the face with their hands, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces. The risk of infection to the employee from the co-worker/client is low.

Q: My employee has recently returned from Iran. They have called the office to check if it was okay to return to work. What should I do?

A: If the worker is sick (regardless of cause), they should not come to work. If the worker is not sick and when the worker returned to Canada, they would have been screened at the airport and advised to self isolate for 14 days and monitor for symptoms. Once the 14 days has passed and the worker continues to be well, they will be cleared by the medical authorities. The worker can then provide a written note and return to work.