

COVID-19 Safety Measures at Work

This fact sheet explains the law in general. It is not intended as legal advice for your particular problem. Because each person's situation is different, you may need to seek legal advice. The information in this fact sheet was reviewed by a lawyer, and was last updated on 1 December 2020.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you may face risks in carrying out your job. This fact sheet explains some of the COVID-19 risks in the workplace, your employer's responsibility to manage the risks, and safety measures that can be implemented in the workplace to protect workers from contracting COVID-19.

How does COVID-19 create risks to me at work?

COVID-19 is infectious. The virus that causes the disease can be transmitted from one person to another in several ways. The virus can spread in droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus may stay on a surface that is not cleaned, and the virus can spread if a person touches the unclean surface and then touches their face. Therefore, without proper protections, a worker may be exposed to COVID-19 in their workplace.

Who is responsible for managing COVID-19 risks in my workplace?

Your employer. It is your employer's responsibility to carry out proper risk assessments in the workplace and provide necessary safety measures to protect you (the worker) from undue hazards. During the COVID-19 pandemic, if your job puts you at the risk of contracting COVID-19 without proper protections, it may be an undue hazard.

Reminder: You have the fundamental right to refuse unsafe work that expose you to undue hazard. For more information, check out our fact sheet on *Your Right to Refuse Unsafe Work*.

What safety measures should my employer take to minimize COVID-19 risks in my workplace?

Your employer should take all measures necessary to minimize COVID-19 risks in the workplace. There are different types of measures, and employers need to start with the type of measure that offers the highest level of protection. WorkSafeBC has recommended four types of safety measures to employers (ranked from high to low in the level of protection they each offer):

1. Elimination – this refers to physically removing the hazard, such as limiting the number of people in the workplace by facilitating working remotely;
2. Engineering controls – this refers to isolating people from the hazard, such as installing physical barriers to separate people;
3. Administrative controls – this refers to changing the way people work, such as rules and guidelines on the number of people allowed in the workplace and cleaning practices;
4. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – this refers to protecting workers with PPE.

I have heard of safety measures such as physical distancing, plexiglass barriers, and PPE. What are they and how would they protect me?

1. Physical distancing

Physical distancing refers to people staying at least 2 meters (6 feet) away from each other. Droplets come out of a person’s mouth and nose when they cough, sneeze or even speak. These droplets usually land one or two meters away from the person. By having people stay at least 2 meters away from each other, the risk of the virus spreading through droplets is reduced.

In the workplace, an employer may implement several measures to ensure physical distancing. Some examples include limiting the number of people in the workplace, rearranging the workplace to allow more space for physical distancing, and establishing rules and guidelines to keep people separated.

2. Plexiglass barriers

Plexiglass barriers are transparent physical barriers that separate people from each other. The barrier can reduce COVID-19 risks by stopping the spreading of droplets on people or on surfaces at the other end of the barrier. In the workplace, an employer may install barriers such as plexiglass when physical distancing cannot always be maintained.

3. PPE

If the above measures are not enough to reduce COVID-19 risks in the workplace, the use of PPE to protect workers is the final resort. The most common PPE are face masks. WorkSafeBC has listed the following tips for using masks:

- Don’t wear masks below the nose or chin.
- Keep your mask clean and dry.
- Change masks as necessary.
- Make sure you know how to clean your mask.
 - Wash cloth masks every day using the warmest water setting. Store in a clean, dry place to prevent contamination.
 - Disposable masks cannot be laundered.
- Practise good hygiene even if you’re wearing a mask.

For more information on PPE, check out our fact sheet on *Your Right to PPE*.