

Your Obligation to Report Health and Safety Hazards during COVID-19

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.

The law requires that the workplace be a safe and healthy place to work. In British Columbia, while it is the employer's responsibility to ensure a safe and healthy workplace, workers nonetheless have distinct obligations when it comes to workplace safety. This fact sheet explains workers' health and safety obligations in the workplace, and in particular, the obligation to report and its applicability in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a worker in BC, what obligations do I have with regards to health and safety in the workplace?

WorkSafeBC has listed the following obligations of workers in making sure that both themselves and their fellow workers stay healthy and safe on the job, including:

- Be alert to hazards. Report them immediately to your supervisor or employer.
- Follow safe work procedures and act safely in the workplace at all times.
- Use the required personal protective equipment (PPE) properly (Note: for more information on PPE, check out our fact sheet on *Your Right to PPE*).
- Co-operate with people who are responsible for health and safety in your workplace. This could include joint occupational health and safety committees, worker health and safety representatives, WorkSafeBC prevention officers, etc.
- If you are injured on the job, you should get treatment quickly and tell the health care provider that the injury is work-related. You should follow the treatment advice of health care providers.
- When you return to work after an injury, ensure that you are doing so safely by modifying your duties and not immediately starting with your full, regular responsibilities.
- Never work under the influence of alcohol, drugs or any other substance. Never work if you are overly tired.

What is the obligation to report?

As a worker, you must report to your employer any hazard in the workplace that is likely to harm the health or safety of yourself or others.

It is worth mentioning that as a worker in Canada, you have the fundamental right to refuse unsafe work. Unsafe work refers to work that would create undue hazard to anyone. For more information, check out our fact sheet on *Your Right to Refuse Unsafe Work*.

What does the obligation to report refer to in the context of COVID-19?

The COVID-19 pandemic has created new risks to workers' health and safety. The government of Canada has clarified that "a worker has the obligation to report their own potential exposure to COVID-19 that caused or is likely to cause illness to themselves or any other person"¹ at the workplace.

Similarly, if you have safety concerns related to COVID-19, such as inadequate protection measures in the workplace, these concerns should be reported to your supervisor or employer.

How could I know if I have a potential exposure to COVID-19?

In BC, if you are a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case, you will be directly contacted by a member of the regional public health team. For example, if a person is a close contact of someone who has a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) Region, then a member of VCH's public health team will contact them to let them know. However, it is possible that not everyone who has been exposed to a confirmed case can be reached. You can always check the public exposure information posted by Regional Health Authorities online. The information can be found at: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/public-exposures>

I have reported my exposure to COVID-19 to my employer. What happens next?

To ensure the health and safety of everyone at the workplace, your employer should not let anyone who has symptoms or who has been exposed to COVID-19 enter the workplace. Therefore, you may be asked to stay at home and self-isolate after being exposed to COVID-19.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/covid-19/rights-responsibilities.html>