**Best Practices for Returning to Work and Reopening Workplaces**

**Part 1 Notes**

**Purpose and outcomes of the webinar**

Over the last few months British Columbian’s have been asked to stay at home for the most part, and if we do need to venture out to practice “safe distancing” when in the company of others, and to avoid coming into contact with others outside our immediate household.

We’ve all felt the strain, however, in adhering to the advice of health officials we are now able to reopen our economy and most businesses are able to reopen and many employees can return to work.

Unfortunately, in order to avoid any resurgence of the Coronovirus, and to ensure the safety of employees and visitors, businesses must develop protocols.

These protocols are called Business Continuity Plans or Return to Work Plans but essentially, they are Safety Plans.

By the end of this 2 Part Webinar you will:

* Understand the issues related to Safety Plans
* Understand the components of a Safety Plan
* Be provided with guidance and tools to develop and adapt a Safety Plan to reopen your workplace

**Worker Safety**

* Discussion about worker safety

No matter if an organization located in British Columbia falls under the Canada Labour Code or the BC Employment Standards, their employees are all covered under WorkSafeBC in the event of a workplace illness or injury.

Employers pay an insurance premium to WorkSafeBC. This provides employers with protection from lawsuits related to worker compensation for work-related injuries and illnesses in British Columbia.

In return, employers must ensure and promote the health and safety of their employees

Employees have the right to refuse unsafe work. If they have reasonable cause to believe that performing a job or task puts them or someone else at risk, they must not perform the job or task. They must immediately notify their supervisor or employer, who will then take the appropriate steps to determine if the work is unsafe and remedy the situation.

When employees refuse work because they believe it's unsafe, consider it an opportunity to investigate and correct a situation that could have caused harm.

If an employee refuses work because it's unsafe, workplace procedures will allow the issue to be properly understood and corrected. The attachment called “Steps to follow when work might be unsafe” is located at the end of the webinar slides

Some employees may believe that returning to work at this time will cause or aggravate an existing disability such as anxiety, an autoimmune disorder or respiratory problems, or lead to some other increased risk to health and safety. Consider in advance how you will handle these concerns, including who such concerns should be directed to.

Consider what disciplinary or other consequences will be applied to employees who fail or refuse to comply with the COVID-19 Safety Plan. Will employees be sent home in these circumstances, and if so, will they be paid or unpaid? When considering the issue of discipline, take into consideration whether the employee's action constitutes misconduct, or the right to refuse unsafe work under WorkSafeBC. Also, consider what steps will be taken where a visitor fails or refuses to comply with the COVID-19 Safety Plan.

Consider in advance what steps you will take if an employee or their family member tests positive for COVID-19, or, is exhibiting symptoms of possible COVID-19, or has been exposed to someone else with COVID-19. Will self-quarantining or testing be required in these circumstances, and what happens if the test result comes back positive or negative? What steps will be taken with respect to contact tracing among other employees, and who will be responsible for that? Will the office remain open while these steps are taken, or are there any additional protective measures that will be implemented in these circumstances? How will a positive test result in the workplace be communicated to other employees, bearing in mind the privacy rights of the employee with confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

\*\*WorkSafeBC now requires employers to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan that outlines policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and to ensure the health and safety of employees. Some of the considerations I just spoke about should be included in your Safety Plan.

You do not need a formal plan in place to begin operation, but you are expected to develop it while protecting the safety of your employees.

Although WorkSafeBC will not be reviewing or approving the plans of individual employers, the plan **must be posted** at the worksite. If for any reason a WorkSafeBC inspection occurs, you will be asked about the steps you have taken to protect your employees or asked to see the plan if it has been developed.

A part of developing your COVID-19 Safety Plan is identifying protocols that everyone at the workplace must follow to keep employees safe. We will be discussing protocol considerations in Parts 1 & 2 of the webinar.

Your responsibility is to ensure the health & safety of your employees. Your Safety Plan will also keep employees and visitors safe while in the office.

Developing a COVID-19 Safety Plan will ease employee concerns about an unsafe work environment.

**Steps to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan**

There are 6 steps to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan

Step 1 - Conducting a Risk Assessment

Step 2 is comprised of 2 parts – the first part is Implementing Protocols for Offices AND the second part is developing a protocol plan to reduce the risk of person-to-person transmission

Step 3: Develop policies

Step 4: Develop communication plans and training

Step 5: Monitor workplace and update plans as necessary

Step 6: Assess and address risks from resuming operations

For the remainder of this webinar we will be delving into:

* Step 1 - Conducting a Risk Assessment, and
* Step 2A – Implementing Protocols for Offices

Steps 2B through 6 will be covered during Part 2 of the webinar next week.

**Conducting a risk assessment**

**Step 1**

Before starting the Safety Plan, identify who the decision makers are.

What are their responsibilities?

Will you have a Pandemic Liaison - the individual assigned to develop, coordinate and execute the pandemic planning, prevention, and policy efforts?

Who else will be on the Safety Plan team - an employee rep from each department, members of the Health & Safety Committee? For greater buy in it is best to have a mix of supervisory and non-supervisory employees on the team.

Understand the risks associated with:

Person-to-person transmission – this risk is increased the closer you come to other people, the amount of time you spend near them, and the number of people you come near. Physical distancing measures help mitigate this risk.

 Surface transmission such as door knobs, desks, countertops – this risk is increased when many people contact the same surface, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Effective cleaning and hygiene practices help mitigate this risk.

Common/shared tools and equipment transmission such as telephones, photocopiers. As with surface transmission the risk is increased when many people contact the same tools and equipment, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Again, effective cleaning and hygiene practices help mitigate this risk.

The risk of transmission increases when many people contact the same surface and when those contacts happen over short periods of time

There are 5 steps to risk assessment.

Step 1: Identify the hazards.

* Identify where people gather such as break rooms or meeting rooms
* Identify job tasks and processes where employees are close to one another or to members of the public (at the office, in employee vehicles or other work locations)
* Identify tools, machinery and equipment that employees share while working
* Identify surfaces that people touch often such as doorknobs and light switches

Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how.

Step 3: Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions.

Step 4: Record your findings and implement them.

Step 5: Review your risk assessment and update if necessary.

In addition to conducting the risk assessment here are some other considerations:

Consider timing for the reopening of your workplace.

For employees who have been laid off, consider how they will be recalled

Consider whether all employees will return to the workplace at the same time, or if the return to work will occur in stages, with some employees returning before others.

Consider if some employees who are able to work or continue working remotely from home be permitted or required to do so, while other employees return to the physical workplace

If a staggered return to work is contemplated, consider which employees will return first. To do this you need to identify:

* Critical business functions
* Essential Services Identification
* Essential Services Staffing

I have prepared “How to Identify and Maintain Critical Business Functions” documents that will help you with this identification process. They will be available on the Naut’sa mawt Tribal Council website after the webinar

**Implementing Office Protocols**

**Step 2A**

One part of developing your COVID-19 Safety Plan is identifying protocols that everyone at the workplace must follow to keep employees safe.

The following are office specific protocols to use as you develop the plan for your workplace.

Building access

Workplace Operations

Workstations

Communal spaces

Outside visitors

Deliveries

Transportation

Elevator use

These protocols are not a list of requirements; however, they should be considered and implemented to the extent that they address the risks at your workplace. You may need to identify and implement additional protocols if these do not adequately address the risk to your workers.

Let’s start working through each of these office protocols.

**Building Access**

* Workplaces should stagger start and end times if crowding at entry and exit locations means the physical distancing requirement of at least 2 metres cannot be maintained.
* It may be necessary to create a protocol on office occupancy and track the numbers entering and exiting the building. These entry/exit points may need to be controlled to ensure distance between employees and visitors.
* Consider designating doors for entry and exit to prevent employees and others from coming into proximity with one another.
* Consider making hand sanitizer available to employees and visitors as they enter the building.
* Post signage indicating that employees or visitors exhibiting COVID-like symptoms are not allowed to enter the building (a sample “entry check for visitors” poster will be available at the end of this webinar)
* Post signs on the outside of the entry doors stating the building occupancy, social distancing requirements, flow of persons, and any other issues to be noted.
* Signs should also be posted throughout the building, warning employees and visitors to cough or sneeze into an elbow, regular handwashing and hygiene, limited face-touching, etc. (sample “coughing and sneezing etiquette”, and “handwashing techniques” posters will be available at the end of this webinar)
* It may be necessary to use tape or other floor markings to indicate safe places to stand, and in narrow hallways you may need to use physical barriers or tape to mark out walking areas or create “one-way” halls.

**Workplace Operations**

* Avoid meetings or gatherings where physical distances cannot be maintained. Consider using larger rooms, moving meetings outside, or having all or some attendees attend virtually.
* If employees come to work when they are sick or if they get sick while at work – send them home immediately.

Considerations

* Where possible, employers should consider remote work options for employees who do not require office attendance.
* To assist in remote meetings, your IT staff or contractor may need to look at improving your videoconferencing equipment and remote networking capacity.
* Consider alternating and/or adding additional shifts to reduce the risk of exposure and maintain the physical distancing requirement.
* Consider creating groups of employees who work together and who do not interact with other groups. This will assist in reducing transmission throughout the workplace in the event that an employee becomes ill.
* Consider establishing one-way staircases to minimize employee contact – if this is established, post signage to indicate the direction.
* You will want to consider separating receptionists and others that directly interact with visitors, possibly by erecting a glass or Plexiglas barrier.

**Work stations**

Considerations:

* If office attendance is required, position employees in a location that allows them to put more distance between themselves and their co-workers or visitors. Arrange workstations at least 2 metres apart and away from communal pathways.
* Consider making communal pathways one directional to reduce personal interactions.
* If necessary, install effective barriers (e.g., plexiglass shields) between workstations.
* Where possible, cancel in-person meetings and hold meetings by teleconference, video conference, or email instead.
* Minimize sharing office space or workstations. If employees must share office space, integrate these locations into your cleaning and hygiene protocols, ensuring that frequently-touched surfaces are addressed such as the computer keyboard and mouse, desk surface, and telephone.
* Provide each workstation with hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes. Employees should wipe down work stations at the start and end of their workday.

**Communal Spaces**

* Ensure that whatever changes you make to the usage of communal areas is clearly communicated to employees. Communication is critical!
* Limit the number of employees allowed in common areas at any one time.
* Encourage employees to eat outside or at their desk.
* If breaching the physical distancing requirement is unavoidable, plan the work task and provide instructions to employees to ensure that time spent in close proximity is minimized.
* Restrict eating to a clearly identified and dedicated area with handwashing stations, cleaning and disinfectant supplies, and adequate space to maintain the physical distancing requirement.
* Require employees to bring their own dishes and utensils.
* Refrain from providing and consuming communal foods.
* Allow communal doors to remain open throughout the workday to reduce contact with door handles.
* If measures such as propping open doors are being considered, how will this work in terms of safety and security concerns, fire code regulations and other considerations?
* Instruct employees to use their own equipment, such as pens, staplers, headsets, and computers.

* Minimize the number of people using previously shared office equipment or other items (photocopiers, coffee machines, microwave ovens, etc.). Shared equipment should be cleaned and disinfected after each use.
* Establish hygiene practices that address the needs of the workplace that includes the requirement to wash or sanitize hands after coming into contact with public items (a sample handwashing techniques poster will be available at the end of the webinar).
* Washroom occupancy could be reduced by closing every other washroom sink or stall. Ensure that there is plenty of soap and disposable towels available in washrooms
* Staff rooms may need to be altered or closed, or break times staggered to reduce the number of people in the room at one time.

CONSIDER:

* Consider single-person access if entry into a constricted area is required.
* Consider staggered break times to reduce large gatherings and encourage employees to take breaks at their own desk or outside.
* Consider distancing the tables in lunch rooms, or installing plexiglass dividers at the tables.
* Consider whether any measures are necessary to limit or control third-party access to the workplace. Consider what physical distancing, sanitization, PPE or other requirements will be imposed on third parties present in the workplace, and what steps will be taken if a third-party refuses to comply with these requirements
* Review custodial cleaning and disinfecting schedules and update as required. Consider frequent touchpoints such as door handles, light switches and elevator buttons, and what steps are necessary to ensure they remain clean and disinfected.
* Consider what steps will be taken to ensure that common equipment such as coffee machines, cups and glasses, microwave ovens, vending machines, water coolers and photocopiers remain clean and disinfected, and will all such equipment remain in use or will some of it be temporarily removed or shut off
* Consider closing or restricting common areas to prevent informal gatherings. If a reception area is required, considering removing most of the chairs to limit occupancy

**Outside Visitors**

* If required, visits to the workplace should be prearranged, staggered, and safety protocols should be communicated before entry into the workplace (e.g., email and/or signage posted at the entrance). Keep a record of visitors to the workplace.
* To ensure social distancing, visitors should wait in the waiting area until the employee they are meeting with comes to get them.
* Post signage at the workplace to inform everyone of the measures in place such as building occupancy, social distancing requirements, flow of persons, and any other issues to be noted. Signage should ask sick visitors to not enter the building.
* When booking appointments, visitors should be reminded to reschedule if they experience symptoms typical of COVID-19 or are placed on self-isolation.
* Minimize non-essential in-person interaction between employees and visitors (e.g., use of virtual meeting tools, email, or telephone).
* Waiting areas should be arranged to maintain physical distancing requirement. Install barriers between receptionists and visitors (e.g., plexiglass). Place markings on the floor directing visitors where to stand when approaching reception desk. (The attachment “Designing Effective Barriers” will be available at the end of the webinar)
* Provide visitor-facing staff with hand sanitizer for their use only.
* Remove non-essential communal items, such as excess furniture, candy, magazines.
* Beverages (coffee, tea, water) should not be offered at this time.
* Provide a safe place for visitors to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and other personal protective equipment.
* Visitors should attend appointments alone and minimize time spent in the waiting area before their appointments (e.g., request visitors to wait in vehicles and text message or call when ready).

**Deliveries**

* Ensure that delivery zones are clearly identified and limited to receivers and deliverers only.
* Arrange for suppliers and/or delivery persons to drop off goods at the delivery zone to avoid searching for departments or employees within the premises.
* Request contactless delivery to maintain physical distancing requirements (e.g., delivery person leaves packages in a pre-arranged location). This option however, may be limited if signing or proof of receipt is required.

**Transportation**

* Non-essential transportation or business travel should be limited and on an exceptional basis only. Restrict travel between offices or work locations to critical business functions only.
* Minimize the use of shared vehicles. If required, follow appropriate disinfection procedures before and after travel for vehicle surfaces such as the steering wheel, gear shift, and door handles.
* Where possible, communicate using telephone, text message, or other communication technology instead of travelling to a face-to-face meeting.
* If transporting clients to medical appointments follow the protocols developed by the health department and health authorities

**Elevators**

* Post occupancy limits on elevators.
* Place tape or markings on the ground to indicate where employees or visitors should stand while lining up to enter the elevator and while in the elevator. Ensure adequate space is provided for those exiting the elevator.
* Make sure elevator panels are routinely disinfected.