

Human Resources Considerations Related to COVID-19



BC Aboriginal
Child Care Society

The BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) is a Centre of Excellence for Indigenous early learning and child care (IELCC). We are committed to nurturing excellence through community outreach, education, research and advocacy, to ensure every Indigenous child in BC has access to spiritually enriching, culturally based, high quality early learning and child care services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that we must all adjust to a new normal and do our part to reduce the spread of the virus. At this unprecedented time everyone's health, safety, and well-being, should be at the heart of every employer's decision-making. Child care is no exception.

This resource sheet offers ideas and considerations for IELCC program managers and employers who would like some ideas about how to provide support to staff as we enter the phase of a new normal.

Before acting on the considerations below, it is essential to make sure you are familiar with current direction from Public Health, WorkSafe BC regulations, the Employment Standards Act and your local leadership directives. Moving forward will require extensive collaboration among leadership and management.

Clearly our world has changed. Preparing for the next year or longer will require significant alterations to our environments, service delivery models, policies, and job descriptions to ensure a safe workplace. Whether your programs remain open, re-open, change their service delivery models or have temporarily closed, every program needs to meet the new health and safety standards so that staff, children, families, Elders, and communities are protected.

To ensure that your program is functioning in a way that reflects the current situational context we suggest you follow these four steps: Familiarize yourself with current advice; review and evaluate risks, needs and resources; update dated and/or create missing documents; and communicate the changes.

1. BECOME FAMILIAR WITH CURRENT ADVICE

In order to make the best decisions and to keep everyone safe, employers and managers must keep up to date with the most current public health advice and protocols as well as monitor provincial employment standards and policies related to COVID-19.

The following links will help:

- [WorkSafeBC](#)
- [RegionalHealthAuthorities](#)
- [EmploymentStandards-COVID-19Advice](#)
- [FNHACoronavirus](#)
- [BCCentreforDisease](#)
- [CanadaPublichealth](#)
- [MCFDChildCareResponsetoCOVID](#)
- [BCHumanRightsCOVIDPolicy](#)

“The surest means to guard against inequality and injustice during the pandemic is to ensure that all of our actions are evidence-based.”
(BC-OHRC_COVID19_Policy-V5.pdf, P.5)



2. REVIEW AND EVALUATE RISKS, NEEDS, AND RESOURCES

Pandemic conditions are unpredictable and the status of your community needs, staff availability and the advice of public health officials is changing and fluctuating constantly under the new normal. Employers and managers will need to continuously evaluate and implement vigorous workplace policies and procedures that support the well-being, safety and health of staff, children and families.

Employers have a duty to provide a safe place to work and protect staff health and safety. In order to meet this responsibility, consider the following:

Environment/context

I. Community

- Access to medical care or support services
- Underlying medical concerns
- Access to or risks of shared transportation
- Access to the worksite due to community self-isolation

II. Children and families

- Interacting with children and families increases risks
- Specific policies or measures are needed to keep everyone safe

III. Workplace

- Physical work environment of staff
- Financial considerations
- Changes to service delivery models
Changes may impact your program, including staffing costs or revenue available. Further, required changes to the staff work environment may have legal and financial implications that need to be considered.

- Staffing

Whether open, re-opened, operating outreach only, or temporarily closed, employers need to prepare for potential increased absences and changes in staffing.

- o **Capacity**

Programs may find themselves without enough staff to undertake the services they would like to provide and should be prepared to adjust their plans accordingly and suddenly. Additionally, employers may find that they have to lay off staff or that staff request to take leave because of health or other COVID-19 related responsibilities. Employers should consider possible legal implications often outlined in employment contracts.

- o **Availability**

Programs may find that staff are unable to dedicate the number of hours required or cannot access the program due to increased responsibilities at home, closure of communities, transportation issues, or illness.

- o **Absences**

Employers are encouraged to consider that under these unusual circumstances there could be more requests or need for leave (vacation/unpaid/sick/stress/family). Staff may be experiencing increased stress due to caring for children or family members at home, food security, wage insecurity and the overwhelming amount of information about the pandemic. The safety of all staff must be encouraged. Staff must be supported to stay home when they, or any members of their household, experience any related COVID-19 symptoms. Familiarize yourself with [the new unpaid, job-protected leave related to COVID-19](#).



IV. Health

- Underlying health conditions or vulnerabilities
- Mental health support

This pandemic is putting a lot of stress on service providers, families and staff. There are many fears and anxieties around personal, family and community health. Employers and managers need to be particularly sensitive at this time. Consider the following risk reduction strategies:

- o *Ensure someone is available to offer reassurance and compassion*
- o *Include staff in discussions on safety, health policies and procedures*
- o *Encourage self care*
- o *Provide mental health information and resources for staff*
- Policies and procedures (see suggested policies below)

Program and service delivery model

After gathering important information and assessing the risks/needs of offering child care or other early learning programs and supports in your community, determine what level of service can be offered.

I. Open/Re-opened

If you have decided to stay open or re-open your program there are several important things to consider and prepare for.

- Licencing standards

All licensed programs must operate under the relevant COVID-19 guidance from public health and provide information and guidelines to staff.

- Risk reduction

A risk reduction plan should be implemented. It should include:

- o *Robust hygiene procedures*
- o *Safe physical distancing measures*
- o *Outbreak level sanitization procedures as per the BC Child Care Licensing Regulations and public health guidance*

- Potential changes to staff scheduling

- Parameters of care

In order to meet extra cleaning and safety requirements and/or to adjust to variations in numbers of available staff, employers/managers may need to consider:

- o *Changing or reducing the hours of care or service*
- o *Reducing the ratio of children to adults*
- o *Reducing the number of children in the program*

- Possible plans, policies or practice documents required:

- o *Care Plan(s) for Child/Staff Presenting with Symptoms*
- o *COVID-19 Health Policy for Children/Staff*
- o *Temporary Staff Absence Policies (annual leave, sickness, and sick pay)*
- o *Sudden Closure Policy (due to COVID-19 in the program or sudden loss of staffing)*



II. Operating outreach only

Due to safety concerns or staffing considerations programs may fluctuate from providing care or service directly to children and families to providing outreach. This change will significantly affect your staff and many aspects of service. Careful consideration and planning are required to make this a smooth and successful transition for your staff. When altering service to an outreach format consider developing a flexible resourcing plan. Be creative and consider the various opportunities to continue to employ your staff while providing supports and services to your children, families and communities. Consider the following:

- Telework / remote work arrangements

During this unprecedented time it is critical for staff and employers to find a balance in accommodating changes to employment roles and work environment. Many staff will have new competing responsibilities that will require creativity and flexibility to manage. Consider how the following may need to be accommodated:

- o Caring for children and other family members*

- o Creating space at home to work*

- o Availability of computer equipment and office or learning materials*

- o Provide phone and internet support, email and other online technologies*

- o Resources required for remote work*

- o Ensure remote work policies are up-to-date and clearly communicated to staff*

- o Research legal considerations such as maintaining security of personal and confidential information*

- Work in centre

- o Ensure increased health and safety measures are in place*

- o Consider setting a staff schedule to support safe physical distancing*

- Outreach

- o Ensure safe physical distancing with co-staff and families*

- o Establish safe use of transportation (changes may be required to ensure safety such as limiting staff in vehicle, utilizing work vehicles rather than personal vehicles)*

- o Create a communications plan and ensure connectivity*

- Modified work arrangements

- o Split shifts*

- o Job sharing*

- o Staggered start times*

- o Staff directed schedule*

- Possible plans or policies required

- o Work from home agreement*

- o Social media, privacy and cyber security policies*

- o Personal protective equipment provision and policies*



III. Temporarily closed

- Stay in regular contact with staff while program is closed
- Share mental health support information
- Support staff transition to layoff status
 - o *See Employment Standards guidelines for terminations and temporary layoffs. Unless temporary layoffs are provided for in an staff employment contract or collective agreement, staff must agree to a temporary lay off. The maximum length of a temporary lay off has been extended to 16 weeks, after which the lay off is deemed to be a termination.*
 - o *Prepare written documentation to lay off or terminate staff*
 - o *Prepare ROEs*
 - o *Support staff to apply for CERB if they have been laid off or lost work due to COVID-19 (refer to new program details in relation to CERB that allows staff to earn up to \$1000.00 per month in addition to monthly benefits)*
 - o *Re-evaluate potential re-opening regularly and communicate with staff about plans for re-opening*
- Possible plans and policies required
 - o *Return to work plan or rehire policies*

3. SUGGESTED GLOBAL PLANS AND POLICIES

- o *COVID-19 Health Policy for Staff*
- o *COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan*
- o *Environmental Safety Plan*
- o *Staffing Plan*
- o *Redefined Job Descriptions*
- o *Privacy and Personal Information*

Employers need to be careful about what information they request of staff around illness and protect the information they collect. Employers may not disclose employee personal information outside the organization [other than as required by public health] or to other employees. Employers should actively discourage workplace rumours. Staff may be sensitive and want to protect their privacy around COVID-19 related symptoms, however staff and employers alike must follow reporting protocols set by public health.

- o *Human Rights*

Given the seriousness of the pandemic and the statement release by the BC Human Rights Commission it is important for employers to consider their duty to protect the human rights of staff and all decisions should be based on advice from public health officials. For more information on employer obligations see the message from the BC Human Rights Commissioner in the BC Human Rights COVID-19 Pandemic Policy Statement.

4. COMMUNICATION

Communicating with staff during this time is critical to ensure safe and positive outcomes for all workplace interactions. Consider including the following information:

- How you plan to share and update information with staff and families
- Public health information on recommendations to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and explain the symptoms
- Background about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it is affecting your program
- Program health and safety measures implemented to protect staff, children and families
- How the measures might affect employment levels and job expectations
- What policies/procedures have been updated/created and where to find them
- Who to turn to when staff have questions

BCACCS has launched a COVID-19 resource webpage. Check what other information is available by visiting <https://www.acc-society.bc.ca/services/early-learning-and-child-care-resources-for-navigating-covid-19/>

