

<p>QUESTION AND ANSWER</p> <p>Ministry of Labour Date: April 17, 2020 Updated: May 19, 2020 Minister Responsible: Harry Bains</p>	<p>COVID-19 KM/QA</p>
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Key messages

- British Columbians stepped up and are doing their part to stop the spread of COVID-19. Together, we've made a lot of progress.
- BC's Restart Plan lays out the next steps - a careful restart while protecting people and all the progress we've made.
- This is a careful, phased plan to help reopen the economy in British Columbia.
- This will not be a flipping of a switch – more like turning up a dial.
- As more businesses restart, the Province will work with them to make sure employees and customers can feel safe and confident.
- Every industry or sector is being asked to develop sector standards with health and safety measures appropriate to their areas.
- Industry-specific guidance and resources have been released by WorkSafeBC to support employers resuming operations as part of phase 2 of the provincial government's restart plan.
- Every employer must ensure the health and safety of their workers, including developing a plan on how to assess the risk of COVID-19 exposure in the workplace and implement measures to keep their workers safe.
- WorkSafeBC will work with industry associations to ensure the direction and guidance they provide to their members meets the requirements set out by the Provincial Health Officer.

Employees:

1. How is BC supporting workers and dealing with gaps in law?

- The Province has made changes to the Employment Standards Act to better support workers both during the COVID-19 public health emergency and in the long term.
- Firstly, changes allow workers to immediately take unpaid, job-protected leave if they are unable to work for specified reasons relating to COVID-19.
- This means workers who are ill, need to self isolate, need to care for their child or certain other dependants, cannot return to BC because of travel restrictions or whose employer is concerned that the employee may expose others to risk, are able to take leave without putting their job at risk.
- These proactive changes ensure that no one will lose their jobs for prioritizing their health and safety, or the health and safety of their loved ones and their community.
- The leave is retroactive to Jan. 27, 2020, the date that the first presumptive COVID-19 case was confirmed in B.C.
- While on job-protected leave related to the COVID-19 crisis, workers may also be eligible for financial support through expanded Employment Insurance benefits through the federal government.
- Secondly, to better support workers on an ongoing basis, the changes also provide up to three days of unpaid, job-protected leave each year for people who cannot work due to personal illness or injury.
- This is a permanent change to the act that brings B.C. in line with all other provinces in Canada by recognizing unpaid sick leave under employment standards legislation.
- This pandemic has highlighted the importance of having permanent job-protected personal illness or injury leave in place for people in this province.
- We're stepping up and bringing in this new leave to support workers over the long term, beyond this crisis.

2. Are there any legal protections for workers who may suffer mental health effects from this crisis?

- We recognize the stress and anxiety this is causing people — being away from family, friends and our communities is not easy.
- People who feel they can't work because of a mental health issue can take up to three days of unpaid, job-protected leave under the new illness and injury leave we announced in March.
- As with other job leaves, workers wanting to take this leave may need to give some evidence of eligibility if their employer requests it.
- Workers can continue to report a workplace injury — including those related to mental health disorders — during this time and can do so online or by phone.

WorkSafeBC is continuing to register, adjudicate, and make payments on new time-lost claims.

- Workers can call WorkSafeBC's Claims Call Centre at 1 888 967-5377 for assistance.

3. WorkSafeBC is receiving 100's of claims from people regarding COVID-19. What does this mean?

- Having safe and healthy workplaces is incredibly important – not only during this pandemic, but always.
- We are seeing that in certain industries and sectors, some workers may be at a higher risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus based on the nature of the worker's employment.
 - Like workers in health care or the food processing industry.
- This has led to some WorkSafeBC compensation claims related to COVID-19.
- We want to make sure employers reduce the risk of workers contracting the virus through work-related exposure.

4. Will we add a new presumption for health care and retail store employees who get sick from COVID-19?

- We want to make sure employers reduce risk of workers contracting the virus through work-related exposure.
- Having safe and healthy workplaces is incredibly important, not only during this pandemic, but always.
- WorkSafeBC is also looking into adding COVID-19 to their list of presumptions.

5. Why isn't the sick leave you introduced a few weeks ago paid? Isn't it clearly needed?

- People want to know they'll have a job to return to if they take time off to recover from illness — and this job-protected leave gives that assurance.
- The leave is in line with what's offered in most other provinces — it matches, in the number of days and the unpaid, job-protected leaves provided in Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and PEI.
- It's important that we balance the needs of employers, as well as supporting workers.
- That said, we are looking at other ways we can support people who get sick at work too.

6. my child is immune compromised and I follow the BC CDC suggestion to keep them away from gatherings, and this includes school, am I protected by recent amendments to the Employment Standards Act? Can I lose my job for keeping my child home?

- The recent Employment Standards Act amendments included unpaid job protected leave which apply to those who are providing care to their minor child.
- There is no time limit on how long people can take this leave for; and,
- As long as they are unable to work for the reasons laid in the ESA, and related to COVID-19, they are eligible for job-protected leave.
- It is my hope that employers make reasonable accommodations, such as continuing to work from home, for people in situations where they are able to work, but cannot go into the office due to their families health and safety.

Employers:

7. Tell me about the COVID-19 Safety Plan guide?

- A COVID-19 Safety Plan template is available on the [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com) website. It will guide employers through a six-step process to help them create the plan. The plan is provided as a fillable PDF file that can be downloaded.

8. Will WorkSafeBC be reviewing and approving the COVID-19 safety plans of all businesses before they reopen?

- WorkSafeBC will not be reviewing or approving the COVID-19 safety plans of individual employers, but employers will need to provide their plan during a WorkSafeBC inspection.

9. How will you ensure that a business has a plan in place?

- WorkSafeBC will be launching a verification and inspection initiative the week of May 19.
- The purpose of the province-wide inspection initiative is to ensure workplaces have a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place and that it's being implemented effectively to keep workers safe.

10. What about Section XX in the guidelines, it doesn't relate to my business. How am I supposed to adhere to it?

- These documents from WorkSafeBC are guidelines to help businesses understand best practices. Every business is different and will need to make adjustment that suit their needs.
- If a business needs more help for their Individual circumstance, they should contact WorkSafeBC.

11. What safety protocols are in place for BC industry? Construction, retail, workcamps?

- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations continue to apply and be enforced by WorkSafeBC.
- Work is underway to get information to workers, employers and industry about how to make sure workplaces are safe and healthy.
- The Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, has provided guidance to many industries such as mining and construction, on best practices during the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- WorkSafeBC has also issued industry specific guidance on its website to help businesses understand best practices and obligations.

12. What are employers' obligation for providing a sanitary workplace on construction sites?

- No worker should be in an unsafe environment that could be hazardous to their health while on the job.
- Employers have a responsibility and an obligation to provide workers with safe working conditions, as laid out in WorkSafeBC's Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines and by the Public Health Officer.
- Regulation (4.85) requires that all workplaces require either fixed or portable washroom facilities – including provision for hand washing. These are required to be maintained, kept clean/sanitary with adequate supplies.
- Similar provisions apply to where workers consume food (4.84). Employers must provide these facilities and where there are concerns, workers first raise these with their respective safety reps/supervisors.
- WorkSafeBC also has industry specific guidance on its website to help businesses understand best practices and obligations.

13. How does a worker refuse unsafe work? Do they have any rights?

- Given these extraordinary times, workers' safety is paramount, and workers in B.C. have the right to refuse work if they believe it presents an undue hazard.
- In these circumstances, the worker should follow steps within their workplace to resolve the issue. The worker would begin by reporting the undue hazard to their employer for investigation and the employer would then need to consider the refusal on a case-by-case basis, depending on the situation. For more information, see Occupational Health and Safety Guideline G3.12.
- Workers can also call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at: 1 888 621-7233.

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14. How are you compelling employers to comply with Dr. Henry's expectations in a COVID-19 environment?

- For all business types generally, WorkSafeBC has prevention officers, these officers are still working, they are still doing inspections.
- Businesses are expected to comply with Dr. Henry's official direction, as well as B.C.'s occupational health and safety laws.
- WorkSafeBC has been reaching out to construction sites and has also been responding to worker concerns. In addition, WorkSafeBC is inspecting construction sites related to COVID-19. This would include ensuring construction sites are following direction from the provincial health officer and are complying with occupational health and safety requirements.
- In addition, municipal police and RCMP are able to enforce Dr Henry's official direction as well.

15. Will WorkSafeBC premiums be reduced to give businesses a financial break?

- WorkSafeBC is allowing businesses to defer paying their premiums for three months without penalty, which will benefit about 84,000 employers.

16. Is three extra weeks of layoff you changed in the ESA really long enough to help businesses?

- We are hopeful that many businesses will be able to bring staff back to work before 16 weeks; and I know many have already begun working on re-opening plans.
- Extending this period to 16 weeks aligns B.C.'s temporary layoff provisions with the federal CERB benefit period — allowing workers to take full advantage of those benefits while keeping them connected to their jobs.
- The timing is also similar to Alberta's extended temporary layoff period (17 weeks).
- The Federal government has also extended their wage subsidy for an extra three months till the end of August. This is to encourage employers to bring their employees back to work.

17. We have no idea when this will end. Why not extend layoffs indefinitely?

- Extending this period indefinitely would leave many employees in limbo — not knowing when or if they may return to work and possibly affecting their eligibility for federal supports or severance.
- If needed, employers and workers may jointly write to the Employment Standards Branch to request to extend their temporary layoff period if longer than 16 weeks is required.
- We also hope many businesses will be able to resume more-normalized operations through parts of the summer, when this happens it will allow many businesses recall employees to go back to work.

18. We've been hearing about people asking to be laid off so they can collect CERB when they could be working. Won't this change help them abuse the supports for longer?

- The federal supports are there to help people who are not able to work and are going through financial hardship due to the pandemic.
- I like to think that most British Columbians are fair and honest and they won't take inappropriate advantage of these supports.

General:

19. What advice to you have to those working from home, or their employers?

- The Prime Minister has asked all people in Canada to work from home, if they are able, as some sectors/jobs may be deemed essential.
- To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, WorkSafeBC has advised employers to consider whether workers can work remotely (i.e., work at home).
- In terms of occupational health and safety, employers have responsibilities for workers working from home that mirror those in the workplace.
- Employers should ensure that a comprehensive written policy on working from home is developed and implemented, and that each workplace party understands their role, duties and responsibilities.

Secondary messaging:

- WorkSafeBC has been working with employers in making sure they are aware of their health and safety obligations.
- When someone is working from home safety measures must still be taken, especially as some workers may be alone.
- People should eliminate tripping hazards around the home.
- Electrical safety, such as making sure to use grounded plugs, should be considered.
- If a worker is alone, phone/email check-ins should be done.
- Each home, each job is different and should be assessed between the employer and worker.

20. What advice do you have to the essential frontline workers who are potentially exposing themselves?

- Our essential and frontline workers are incredibly important to keeping B.C.'s economy moving, allowing people to get groceries and taking care of those who are sick.
- I'd like to extend a tremendous and well deserved thank you to them all.
- Recently, our government announced that health and social service workers delivering in-person, front-line care to some of B.C.'s most vulnerable people will receive a financial boost through temporary COVID-19 pandemic pay.
- Temporary pandemic pay recognizes the frontline workers providing critical public services in health, social services and corrections to those most vulnerable during the pandemic.
- We know that this current situation is difficult for many people and it's encouraging that many private sector employers, such as grocery stores and some banks, are stepping up to provide pay increases for their frontline workers too.
- These workers should be taking the precautions the Provincial Health Officer is suggesting whenever they are out of the house or at work: frequent hand-washing, minimize personal contact with others, and practice physical distancing (and if physical distancing is not an option, wearing a mask).
- Your employer has an obligation to make the workplace safe too:
 - if you are a cashier or work in a retail space with a pay area, ask your employer to put in best-practices seen in many businesses since this pandemic started: plexiglass divider/shields, ways to clean payment machines/registers and keyboards, as well as reducing the amount of customers allowed in the business.

21. I'm confused about where to go for information about my business/employment/health, there are so many places to look?

- Visit www.gov.bc.ca/COVID19 for information and supports that are non-health related or call 1-888-COVID19, anytime between 7:30am-8:00pm, 7 days a week.
- For health-related information visit the BC CDC (centre for disease control) website.
- It's also a good idea to take the COVID-19 self assessment test if you're feeling respiratory symptoms. You can find the test on the BC CDC website.
- This self assessment tool will help you gauge what you need to do next. Whether that is calling 811, going to a hospital or self-isolating at home.

SPEAKING NOTES FOR

MINISTER HARRY BAINS

MINISTER OF LABOUR

BC's Restart Plan Media Availability

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEAKING NOTES

Introduction

- Good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us here today.
- Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples.
 - Including the Squamish, Sto:lo and Tsleil-waututh and Musqueam Nations.
- I'd also like to mention off the top that I'll be hosting a townhall tonight at 7:15 pm – I hope you join us.
- Al Johnson, the Vice President of prevention services at WorkSafeBC will be on the call.
- We're going to answer questions from citizens and talk in detail about WorkSafeBC guidelines.
- So, I encourage you to dial-in through the usual government social media channels as we deliver the answers to many re-start questions!

Acknowledging Situation

- But this morning, I want to answer your questions about the provincial re-start, and what that means to workers and their employers.
- I am acutely aware of impacts to both.
- To workers: the lifeblood of any business.
- They saw operations abruptly dwindle or the doors slam shut at their place of work and many felt uncertain how they'd make ends-meet.
- And to employers: who drive our economy, provide jobs and family-supporting wages to British Columbians...
- They saw supply chains, consumers and cashflows snapped away, practically overnight.
- Unquestionably, the coronavirus has been a global tragedy; and unmistakably, no one is immune to the impacts.

- But B.C. fared well and is now well-positioned to lead in the nation's recovery effort.

WorkSafeBC Guidelines and safety.

- WorkSafeBC has released industry-specific guidance and resources for employers resuming operations as part of phase 2 of the Restart Plan.
- These guidelines can be found on the WorkSafeBC website and they will help businesses re-open in a safe way during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- These guidelines were something that many businesses all over the province have been waiting for.
- We knew they'd be popular.
- So popular, in fact, that the flood of people to WorkSafeBC's website crashed it entirely.
 - They had over 524,000 page views of its guidelines and COVID-19 resources.

- That's a 440% increase in website views compared to the previous week's 97,000.
- It certainly highlights the surge public interest.

WorkSafeBC Responsiveness

- Which is why, during the COVID-19 situation, WorkSafeBC increased the number of prevention officers on the public information lines from 8 to 26 – to keep pace with demand.
 - A 225% jump in call capacity from COVID-19.
- It's also why they've more than doubled safety inspections during the past few months.
 - *From March 22 - April 16, 2019: 4,197*
 - *From March 22 - April 16, 2020: 8,719*
- In fact, last year they did over 10,000 safety inspections and now, less than 6 months into 2020, we've seen a 51% increase in them.
 - So far this year: 15,325 inspections.

- This is to make sure businesses have the best safety measures in place and consumers can place their trust when stepping inside of them.
- And the guidelines released last week contribute to increasing our confidence and our safety.
- WorkSafeBC consulted with many industry associations and organizations, and PHO provided the expertise to create the guidelines.
- These guidelines are a starting point.
- Many businesses are unique or have individual circumstances different than others, and they can speak to WorkSafeBC about those.
- The guidelines were never intended as a silver bullet or one-size-fits-all solution.
- It's a made-in-BC plan specific to our needs.
- We expect the same entrepreneurial spirit that shone throughout the epidemic, like distilleries that pivoted to manufacturing sanitizer, to still shine bright as businesses re-start and recover.

- In fact, it's that pioneering resilience and entrepreneurial spirit that has always defined the west as the best.
- B.C. will continue as a leader.
- Recovery is on its way.

Conclusion

- But recovery comes at its own pace and resiliency requires patience.
- This restart isn't simply a matter of a flipping of a switch – it's more like turning up a dial.
- And it's not a return to normal – but it's a hopeful, careful, thoughtful step towards finding our new normal.
- I feel strongly that working together, our economy will recuperate and be revitalized.
- Social and cultural norms will return and revive.
- Our jobs and businesses will reappear and reinvest in British Columbia.

- And in time, with hard work, BC will return as a national leader of economic growth in Canada.
- Thank you.

-END-

From: [Fitzsimmons, Craig](#)
To: [Hynes, Colin GCPE:EX](#)
Cc: [McCaffrey, Julianne GCPE:EX](#); [Tomana, Sukhi GCPE:EX](#); [Wey, Melody GCPE:EX](#)
Subject: RE: ASAP stats for media avail
Date: May 20, 2020 3:09:51 PM

In the rush to get this, can you check the math on this? I had it as a 440% increase, my colleague had 540%

From: Hynes, Colin GCPE:EX [<mailto:Colin.Hynes@gov.bc.ca>]
Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 3:03 PM
To: Fitzsimmons, Craig
Cc: McCaffrey, Julianne GCPE:EX ; Tomana, Sukhi GCPE:EX ; Wey, Melody GCPE:EX
Subject: RE: ASAP stats for media avail
Amazing!! Thanks so much Craig!!

From: Fitzsimmons, Craig <Craig.Fitzsimmons@worksafebc.com>
Sent: May 20, 2020 3:02 PM
To: Hynes, Colin GCPE:EX <Colin.Hynes@gov.bc.ca>
Cc: McCaffrey, Julianne GCPE:EX <Julianne.McCaffrey@gov.bc.ca>; Tomana, Sukhi GCPE:EX <Sukhi.Tomana@gov.bc.ca>; Wey, Melody GCPE:EX <Melody.Wey@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: RE: ASAP stats for media avail

- WorkSafeBC had more than 524,000 page views of its guidelines and COVID-19 resources from May 15-19. This is a 440% increase in website views compared to the previous week (97,000 page views).

From: Hynes, Colin GCPE:EX [<mailto:Colin.Hynes@gov.bc.ca>]
Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 2:44 PM
To: Fitzsimmons, Craig <Craig.Fitzsimmons@worksafebc.com>
Cc: McCaffrey, Julianne GCPE:EX <Julianne.McCaffrey@gov.bc.ca>; Tomana, Sukhi GCPE:EX <Sukhi.Tomana@gov.bc.ca>; Wey, Melody GCPE:EX <Melody.Wey@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: RE: ASAP stats for media avail
Thanks Craig, any ETA on any of the other stuff?
Thanks!

From: Fitzsimmons, Craig <Craig.Fitzsimmons@worksafebc.com>
Sent: May 20, 2020 1:57 PM
To: Hynes, Colin GCPE:EX <Colin.Hynes@gov.bc.ca>
Cc: McCaffrey, Julianne GCPE:EX <Julianne.McCaffrey@gov.bc.ca>; Tomana, Sukhi GCPE:EX <Sukhi.Tomana@gov.bc.ca>; Wey, Melody GCPE:EX <Melody.Wey@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: RE: ASAP stats for media avail
Hi Colin, during the COVID-19 situation, we increased the number of prevention officers on the information line from 8 to 26.
Working on the other stats.
Craig

From: Hynes, Colin GCPE:EX [<mailto:Colin.Hynes@gov.bc.ca>]
Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 1:40 PM
To: Fitzsimmons, Craig <Craig.Fitzsimmons@worksafebc.com>
Cc: McCaffrey, Julianne GCPE:EX <Julianne.McCaffrey@gov.bc.ca>; Tomana, Sukhi GCPE:EX <Sukhi.Tomana@gov.bc.ca>; Wey, Melody GCPE:EX <Melody.Wey@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: RE: ASAP stats for media avail

Great! Thank you so much.

C

From: Fitzsimmons, Craig <Craig.Fitzsimmons@worksafebc.com>

Sent: May 20, 2020 1:36 PM

To: Hynes, Colin GCPE:EX <Colin.Hynes@gov.bc.ca>

Cc: McCaffrey, Julianne GCPE:EX <Julianne.McCaffrey@gov.bc.ca>

Subject: RE: ASAP stats for media avail

On it.

From: Hynes, Colin GCPE:EX [<mailto:Colin.Hynes@gov.bc.ca>]

Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 1:33 PM

To: Fitzsimmons, Craig <Craig.Fitzsimmons@worksafebc.com>

Cc: McCaffrey, Julianne GCPE:EX <Julianne.McCaffrey@gov.bc.ca>

Subject: ASAP stats for media avail

Importance: High

WARNING: This email originated from outside of our organization. Do not click any links or open attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Craig,

Just tried giving you a shout about this.

MO has asked that the minister's speaking notes tomorrow speak to some stats from WorkSafeBC. Specifically, they would like website traffic increase amount, the increase in prevention officers through phone support (they thought it was usually 8, but has increased to 30) as well as things like prevention officer site visits (such as you previously have provided).

Is it possible to do this ASAP? We have to re-write the minister's notes and get them through approvals before 4:30 today.

If you have questions feel free to call me!! Number below.

Colin Hynes

Pronouns he/him/his

Ministry of Labour

Government Communication and Public Engagement

(250)-208-1638

As more information and resources about COVID-19 become available, we will continue to update the COVID-19 section of our website at worksafebc.com. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#) for the latest announcements, jobs, workplace health and safety resources, and news from WorkSafeBC.

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