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BLOG

COVID-19 UPDATE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYERS

The coronavirus (COVID-19) has been the cause of an outbreak of respiratory infections, and while the risk to Canadians is currently low, the number of cases worldwide is changing quickly. Local governments should be aware of precautions that can be taken to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, and to ensure their communities remain as safe and healthy as possible. As employers, local governments must be vigilant in ensuring safe and healthy workplaces.

The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) website contains the latest information about COVID-19 as it relates to the health and well-being of British Columbians, including the latest COVID-19 case counts updated every Friday: [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/novel-coronavirus-\(covid-19\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/novel-coronavirus-(covid-19)). Additionally, the BCCDC and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer have identified four key ways that local governments can prepare for COVID-19, including (1) intergovernmental cooperation; (2) community involvement; (3) employee health; and (4) financial planning (read more at <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID-19-4-Key-Ways-to-Prepare.pdf>).

As employers, local governments should also be mindful that in the coming months, there may be increasing requests for accommodations and compassionate care leave, and a rise in workplace leaves overall, whether paid, unpaid or on short-term disability. Local government employer may also have to make decisions about whether an employee should be sent home or be allowed back in the workplace after an illness.

Local government employers should consider the following checklist of best practices in dealing with workplace issues related to COVID-19:

1. Taking precautions for a safe and healthy workplace

- Developing and communicating health and safety protocols for employees.
- Making alcohol hand sanitizers and soap available to employees and visitors.
- Providing antiseptic wipes to employees for cleaning their workstations regularly.
- Providing posters which promote proper hygiene, including effective handwashing practices.

2. Remaining informed and promoting awareness

- Routinely following reliable public health authorities for news and guidelines on prevention, symptom identification, and treatments as they become available.
- Appointing a coordinator to track and communicate the latest developments of COVID-19.
- Promoting awareness and ensuring management and employees are properly trained on what health and safety measures should be observed at present and in the future.

3. Responding appropriately to symptomatic employees

- Advising employees on what to do should they have flu-like symptoms in the workplace.
- Screening employees for risks of infection and symptoms, taking into consideration human rights legislation and relevant privacy and employment laws.
- If an employee exhibits typical symptoms or has been in contact with an infected person, they should be sent home and advised to seek medical advice as soon as possible.
- Protecting privacy and keeping an employee's information confidential except on a need to know basis.
- Ensuring employees are aware of their benefits and entitlements in the event that they or a family member become ill.

4. Developing and updating relevant policies

- Ensuring all policies related to leaves and providing accommodations in the workplace are up to date.
- Developing an emergency pandemic/ COVID-19 Preparedness Policy.
- Identifying key positions and personnel, cross-training employees and providing for the sequestering and isolation of essential employees where necessary.
- Recognizing that individual circumstances may require certain employers to temporarily allow employees to work from home.

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