

APRIL 01, 2021 COVID-19 UPDATE

COVID-19 cases are currently surging in BC and additional province-wide restrictions were imposed on [March 29, 2021 at 11:59 pm](#). None of the restrictions target the construction industry. The Provincial Health Officer strongly recommends working from home whenever possible, and we encourage our members to follow this guidance where possible.

We also encourage our members to continue to follow COVID Safety Plans and to be particularly cautious in indoor environments. We recommend that members pay special attention to mask use, physical distancing (at least 2 meters), and ventilation to reduce the risk of transmission. Move tool-box talks and meetings outdoors, as much as possible.

Anybody who is experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 or who has been a close-contact of someone with COVID-19 should not be permitted on a worksite.

Variants of Concern

Viruses mutate and change and several variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 are now circulating in BC. Variants that spread more easily and/or make people sicker than the original variant are known as [variants of concern \(VOCs\)](#).

The most common VOC in BC is currently variant B117. This variant was originally identified in the United Kingdom and is expected to become the most common variant of COVID-19 in BC. It spreads more easily than the original variant and causes more severe illness in people who are affected. This leads to a higher risk of hospitalization and death even among young, working-age people. The available vaccines in BC are effective against this variant.

The variant P1, which is associated with a COVID-19 surge in Brazil, is also circulating in BC. It may be able to re-infect people who have had COVID-19. There is not yet enough available data to determine how effective available vaccines and treatments are against this variant and there is some evidence that they may be less effective.

Now that we are dealing with variants that can spread more easily than the original version of the virus there is less room for error in following our COVID Safety Plans. All the layers of protection that we put in place work together to protect us. This includes masks, distancing, hand-washing, ventilation, and staying home when sick.

Masks

Masks control spread of the virus by blocking viral particles in the exhaled breath. This is known as source control. Masks are not respirators and are not designed to filter the inhaled air, however they can provide some protection to the wearer.

Masks must be worn in all indoor spaces where more than one person is present. They should also be used outdoors when physical distancing (2 meters) cannot be maintained.

The BCCSA guidance on the care and use of masks is available in our document [What if Physical Distancing is Not Possible](#).

Masks that fit well and that have multiple layers are more effective than thin or loose masks. They are better at blocking exhaled breath and provide more protection for the wearer. Masks should cover the nose and mouth and should fit against the face without gaps. Face shields do not provide enough protection and are not a substitute for masks.

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Cloth Masks

Health Canada recommends three-layer masks consisting of two layers of tightly woven fabric (e.g. cotton) and one layer of a filter fabric. Some examples from Health Canada of suitable filter fabrics include:

- Non-woven polypropylene fabric;
- A paper kitchen towel that has been folded in half;
- A baby wipe that has been rinsed, dried and folded in half.

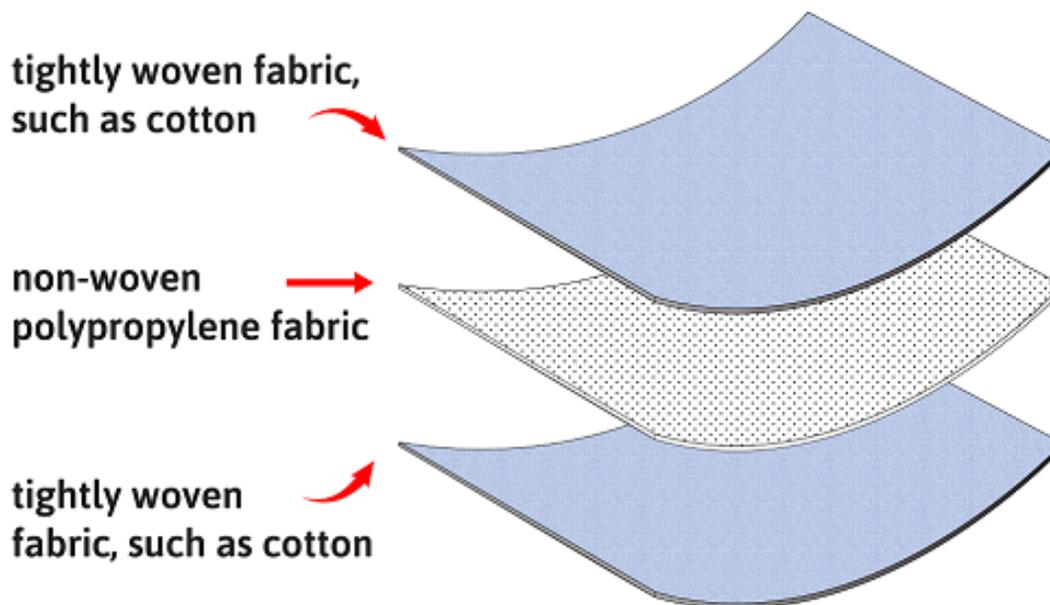


Photo credit: Health Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/sew-no-sew-instructions-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>

Medical procedure masks

Where available, well-fitting medical procedure masks can be as effective as multi-layer cloth masks.

The **United States Center for Disease Control (US CDC)** found that the fit of these masks can be improved by knotting the ear-loop (demonstrated in the photo below). The US CDC also found that wearing a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask can improve fit and is more effective at filtering both exhaled and inhaled breath than either mask alone. Where three-layer masks are not available, combining a medical procedure mask with a cloth mask can improve fit and provide additional layers.

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- A** - Poorly fitting mask with side gap.
- B** - Medical procedure mask covered by cloth mask.
- C** - Medical procedure mask with knot to improve fit.

Photo credit: United States CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7007e1.htm>

Respirators

Respirators such as N95s, KN95s and half-face respirators with P100 filters are also effective at controlling exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19, but respirators that have valves for exhaled breath can spread the virus and should not be used for COVID-19 control.

Rapid Testing

Rapid testing for COVID-19 is an additional layer of protection that can help to identify asymptomatic workers with COVID-19. The Council of Construction Associations (COCA) has reported that rapid testing will soon be available, at cost, for the BC construction industry. More information is available on the [COCA website](#).

False negatives are possible with rapid testing and all COVID safety protocols must continue to be followed for workers who test negative with rapid testing.

Vaccines

BC's COVID-19 vaccination campaign is underway and as of April 1, 2021, 788,249 doses of vaccine have been administered (700,855 first doses and 87,394 second doses). This means that as of April 1, 2021 13% of the BC population has received at least one dose of the vaccine.

The vaccine does not immediately protect you from COVID-19, but after about 2 weeks even one dose of a vaccine will provide some protection.

Workers who have been vaccinated must continue to follow COVID Safety Plan protocols. As more of our population gets vaccinated, we expect that government guidance will be released for loosening restrictions for workers who are fully vaccinated. However, we are not yet at the stage where loosening these restrictions is possible, especially with variants of concern circulating in the province.

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Vaccines - *continued*

Four vaccines are currently approved by Health Canada and all four of these vaccines are safe and effective.

Vaccine eligibility criteria are changing rapidly as the vaccination program progresses. Information on the COVID-19 immunization program and vaccine eligibility is available from [ImmunizeBC](#).

The [BC Employment Standards Act](#) has been updated and now requires employers to provide unpaid time off for employees to receive a vaccine for COVID-19 and/or to assist dependants who are receiving COVID-19 vaccination.