

The New Westminster & District Labour Council echoes the calls of the BC Federation of Labour and many of our affiliates at this time for increased protection for workers during the COVID-19 outbreak. Workers, their families and our communities face both health and economic impacts at this time, and so we call on federal and provincial governments to act now to ensure that all workers can adhere to public health advice around the coronavirus without lost pay or fear of losing their jobs:

- Immediately ensure paid and protected sick leave during the pandemic.
- Be proactive in issuing guidance to employers on their duties and obligations to perform risk assessments and keep workplaces safe, including highlighting the right of workers to refuse unsafe work and waiving the need for a doctor's note to access leave.
- The federal government should waive the one week waiting period for access to EI for those who have lost their jobs due to illness or COVID-19 related layoffs, and to consider other income support options for those impacted by the outbreak including suspending mortgage and rent payments for sick or self-isolating workers until the pandemic subsides.

We recognize the contribution of first responders, front line workers and workers serving the public during the outbreak. We encourage delegates and members to get accurate information on the COVID-19 outbreak from reliable sources, health authorities and governments.

New dedicated phone line for COVID-19 concerns

The province has announced that there will be a new active phone number for British Columbians to call for information on COVID-19. Amid the current outbreak of coronavirus, huge call volumes into the current [provincial health information line available at 8-1-1](#) are causing massive delays and phone wait times. This has sparked the province to announce Monday morning a new number dedicated specifically for COVID-19 concerns.

As of March 16, people can call 1-888-COVID-19 or text 604-630-0300 for details, advice, and further information on the virus.

“In an effort to help 8-1-1 health care professionals to support more people who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or who require assistance with other health issues, the province has created a dedicated phone service to provide British Columbians with information.” said Adrian Dix at a press conference earlier Monday. “Information is available in more than 110 languages.”

COVID-19 resources and information

From the Office of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) and the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) - reliable, official sources on the virus and how to prevent its spread in our communities and workplaces. Check frequently as information is updated on a regular basis.

- **PHO - Current Health Topics** – [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

- **BCCDC** – [COVID-19 information for the general public](#) – check under the “community resources” section for recommendations on precautions for different types of workplaces
 - [COVID-19 Common Questions](#)
 - **For members in health care fields:** [COVID-19 Care](#) – information for health professionals including: personal protective equipment, infection control, and more.
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New BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool

BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool <https://covid19.thrive.health/>

Please do not visit healthcare professionals unless you need immediate help.

Support your local Food banks

While you are preparing your own homes to ride out this outbreak, please don't forget that now, more than ever, it is important to support our local food banks. Food bank users are unable to make preparations to protect themselves or their own families.

Please consider purchasing the \$2 food bank donation tickets available at grocery stores, pick up extra food and drop it off at a food bank when doing your own shopping, hold an online Union Protein Project fundraiser, ask your local union to mail an extra cheque to your local food bank, call the food bank and ask them if they need delivery drivers, adopt a needy family or senior in your neighbourhood and anything else to help without risking your own health.

Helping our most vulnerable is not only the right thing to do, it's also the best thing to do to help our governments in their efforts to “flatten the curve” and avoid our healthcare system being totally overwhelmed.

Read more labour COVID-19 statements here:

- BCFED - [Protection for workers must be key pillar of COVID-19 response](#) (March 9)
- CLC – [Letter to federal Minister of Finance regarding income security measures](#) (Feb 28)
- VDLC – [Emergency Action Needed for Working People and Families](#) (March 16)

On March 11, the federal government announced they will be suspending the one-week waiting period for Employment Insurance sickness benefits in cases of COVID-19 illness or quarantine. You can find details on the program here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-sickness.html>

Shared on behalf of the CLC

On Monday the Canadian Council of the CLC voted to postpone the CLC Convention. More details will be coming out shortly. The Pacific Region CLC office is closed and staff are working from home. Please email if you wish to communicate with them.

Circulated March 18, 2020 by BC College of Pharmacists

Pharmacists in B.C. are now able to provide medication refills to patients without an updated prescription from a doctor or nurse practitioner. Health Minister Adrian Dix announced the change earlier this week in an effort to avoid non-essential visits to physicians, freeing them up to focus on halting the spread of COVID-19.

The College of Pharmacists of B.C. says its member can offer refills or emergency supplies of medications, including controlled drugs, such as opioids. A statement from the college says this will help patients avoid crowded medical offices, allowing safe social-distancing, and will also free up medical professionals to treat more urgent cases.

The college advises patients with compromised immune systems or those at an increased risk of the more severe effects of COVID-19 to refill prescriptions now, rather than visit a clinic if they do become ill. But the statement says there is no need to stockpile medications because that practice could harm the drug supply while putting others at risk.

<https://www.bcpharmacists.org/news/covid-19-public-information-prescription-refills-can-be-provided-pharmacist>

Circulated March 18, 2020 by CBC Canada

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced \$82 billion in funds to help support Canadians during the COVID-19 outbreak, this includes \$27 billion in direct support to workers and businesses, and \$55 billion to meet liquidity needs through tax deferrals. This represents more than three-per cent of Canada's GDP.

These measures that will be implemented include:

- An emergency care benefit that will provide money every two weeks to workers who have to stay home, to self-isolate, quarantine or have to take care of a family member who has COVID-19, and are not eligible for EI. It will continue for up to 15 weeks and individuals can receive \$450 every two weeks.
- A COVID-19 emergency support benefit for the self-employed who have to close shop or people who don't qualify for EI. The government has set aside \$5 billion for this and it will total 14 weeks of support, in a value comparable to EI.

- Temporary wage subsidy to small businesses equal to 10 per cent of salary for three months, to urge companies to keep staff on the payroll and protect jobs. Up to an amount of \$25,000.
- Any money owed for the 2019 tax year do not have to be paid until September 1, 2020, with the filing deadline pushed back to June 1.
- Boost the child care benefit (CCB) in the coming months to help parents during the virus outbreak, totalling a \$2 billion commitment.
- For lower income families, supplement the GST credit in May to offset the consumer tax that they pay. \$300 over individuals and \$150 for every child.
- A six month interest free moratorium on student loans.
- Double the reaching home program and boost funding for shelters. Totalling over \$200 million in support.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/economic-aid-package-coronavirus-1.5501037>

March 16, 2020

Please find attached above a message from BC Housing