

Frequently asked questions

COVID-19 and responsibilities of prime contractors on construction sites

Who is considered the prime contractor on construction sites with multiple employers?

A prime contractor (PC) at a multiple-employer workplace is a contractor, employer, or other individual who enters into a written agreement with the owner of the workplace to be the prime contractor. If there is no written agreement in place or if more than one PC is designated at the same time, the owner of the workplace is considered the PC.

In multiple-employer workplaces, workers from different employers may work in the same area or their work may overlap on various construction projects. This overlap can create hazards that may pose a risk of injury to everyone at the workplace.

For more information, see [section 13](#) of the *Workers Compensation Act* for definitions of “prime contractor” and “multiple-employer workplace.” Also, see related Occupational Health and Safety Policy item [P2-24-1](#).

What are the PC’s responsibilities at a multiple-employer workplace?

The PC is responsible for ensuring that work activities for employers, workers, and other persons at the workplace relating to health and safety are coordinated. PCs must also do everything reasonably practicable to comply with health and safety

provisions of the *Workers Compensation Act* and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.

See [section 24](#) of the Act for more information.

What are the PC’s responsibilities for preventing COVID-19 transmission in the workplace?

Employers in B.C. are required to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan (Safety Plan) and post it at their workplace and on their website, if applicable, as directed by the [Provincial Health Officer’s order](#). For multiple-employer workplaces, each employer must develop its own Safety Plan and provide a copy to the PC.

See [G3.3](#) of the Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines for more information.

The PC must also have a separate Safety Plan. The plan must include the requirement that all employers at the workplace have compliant Safety Plans. Additionally, the PC must ensure that the employers’ Safety Plans are coordinated with the PC’s Safety Plan. This is essential to identify all hazards associated with COVID-19, assess the risks associated with those hazards, and ensure risks are adequately controlled for all those present at the workplace.

You can learn more about developing your Safety Plan on the [COVID-19 section](#) of [worksafebc.com](#). The section includes [industry-specific information](#),

a template for creating your [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#), and other resources. Also see information about the level of detail required and use of supporting documentation in [guideline G3.3](#), Written instructions, training, and supervision: COVID-19 Safety Plan.

What do PCs need to consider to ensure their COVID-19 Safety Plan is effective?

To ensure effective controls are in place, PCs need to consider to the following questions when developing a compliant Safety Plan for a multiple-employer workplace:

- How have you assessed the risk of transmission at your workplace?
- How have you implemented protocols (i.e., controls) to reduce the risk?
- What system or process is in place to ensure all employers have adequate and compliant Safety Plans?
- What process do you follow if people at the workplace are not complying with Safety Plan requirements?
- What policies have you developed to address what to do if someone contracts COVID-19 at the workplace, and how do employers advise you if their workers or visitors may have been at the workplace while infectious?
- How are you ensuring that employers maintain a list of workers who are currently working at the workplace, and that they update it daily?
- How are you ensuring daily health checks are being carried out prior to workers attending the workplace, where possible (e.g., using a mobile app)?
- How are you ensuring COVID-19 control measures are effectively implemented at the workplace? Do you have effective supervision in place to ensure they are being followed (e.g., communicating to lead hands, construction safety officers, and superintendents at the workplace about their responsibility to ensure COVID-19 control measures are being followed and giving them the systems or tools to use in supervising)?
- How are you ensuring high-contact surface areas are being cleaned at regular intervals (e.g., using a cleaning schedule that identifies shared tools, surfaces, and equipment)?
- Have you posted maximum occupancy limits for indoor work areas and outdoor areas, where practical? How did you calculate these limits?
- How do you provide direction to employers and their workers about when workers are not permitted to enter the workplace due to illness (e.g., via signage or orientation)?
- What steps do you take when a worker reports they are ill while at the workplace (e.g., reporting to first aid, isolating from others, cleaning tools and surfaces that are frequently touched)?
- What is your verification process to ensure workers have received training and understand COVID-19 control protocols and procedures for the workplace (e.g., reviewing orientation guidance with workers)?
- If you are providing first aid services for the workplace, has your first aid risk assessment addressed all risks associated with COVID-19? If yes, have you revised your procedures, equipment, supplies, or facilities to account for any changes to the risks?
- How are you ensuring hand sanitizer is provided where handwashing stations are not close to work areas (e.g., assessing work area proximity and scheduling refills)?
- How are you ensuring all workers at the workplace can raise concerns about COVID-19 safety (e.g., displaying signage, providing workplace orientations, holding tailgate meetings)?

- What are you doing to monitor and update your Safety Plan and to ensure employers at your workplace monitor and update their Safety Plans (e.g., scheduling regular reviews; updating the Safety Plan when workers at the workplace test positive, when new industry information identifies gaps, and when the Public Health Officer issues new orders)?

Which areas at the workplace should be given special attention for high-contact cleaning?

Workers of different employers may be present either at the same time or at separate times at a workplace. Because of this, special attention should be given to common areas such as elevators, stairwells, corridors, bathrooms, handwashing stations, walkways, and break areas. The PC and employers must ensure that high-contact surfaces within these areas are routinely cleaned.

How does the PC determine what handwashing facilities are required?

The PC needs to ensure that adequate washroom facilities are provided and maintained as set out by the OHS Regulation. Further guidance is provided in the OHS Guidelines around the [minimum number of required washrooms](#), [washroom facilities where no plumbing is available](#), and [maintenance of washroom facilities](#).

For more information, see OHS Regulation [section 4.85](#), and all of guidelines [G4.85\(1\)-1 to G4.85\(3\)](#).

Does hot water have to be provided for washing facilities, including in plumbed washrooms?

Hot water is recommended for handwashing but not required. It's provided for user comfort only

and helps to promote handwashing for 20 seconds or longer. However, it's important to keep in mind that provisions under the OHS Regulation for emergency washing facilities require a continuous flow of tempered water.

For more information, see guideline [4.85\(1\)-1](#), and OHS Regulation [section 5.89](#).

What other COVID-19 measures does the PC need to ensure are in place?

To aid in potential contact tracing in the event of an exposure, construction employers are required to maintain a list of workers who are currently working at the workplace and update this list daily. The PC must ensure employers at the workplace are fulfilling this requirement.

The PC, employers, and subcontractors must have a mechanism in place for workers to raise issues and concerns about the transmission of COVID-19 at the workplace so that additional precautions and controls can be put in place where required. This is often done through a worker health and safety representative or a joint health and safety committee.

How is the PC ensuring contractors address COVID-19 controls for worker transportation in employer-provided transportation?

If workers are travelling to a workplace in employer-provided transportation — for example, crews travelling from one workplace to another or contract workers travelling together to different workplaces — employers need to ensure the workers complete their daily health checks before they get into the vehicle (i.e., not waiting until they arrive at the workplace to do the check).

The [COVID-19 protocols for the construction sector](#) on [worksafebc.com](#) include the following protocols for worker transportation:

- Whenever possible, workers should travel alone to the workplace in their vehicles to ensure physical distancing.
- Employers should count the number of workers in employer-provided transportation at any given time and employ measures to ensure two metres of distance between workers can be maintained.
- Measures to ensure appropriate distance include having workers sit one to a seat and staggered to allow maximum distance, adjusting the number of workers taken per trip, and increasing the overall number of trips needed to transport workers to a workplace. Employers may also consider using larger vehicles or using multiple vehicles to ensure maximum spacing.
- If it's not possible to ensure sufficient physical distance between workers in a vehicle through the previously mentioned measures, employers must consider other control measures, such as PPE where appropriate.
- Employers must also implement physical distancing when loading and unloading vehicles. Workers waiting for loading or unloading should maintain physical distancing while remaining safely away from traffic.
- Employers should have handwashing facilities or sanitizing stations available to workers as they enter and exit the vehicle.

- Employers must ensure that high-contact surfaces within the vehicle are routinely cleaned. These include seatbelts, headrests, door handles, steering wheels, and hand holds.

The PC must ensure that employers include worker transportation information in their Safety Plans.

What about work-related social activities and carpooling?

The Provincial Health Officer has reported exposures in work-related social situations, which demonstrates the importance of following COVID-19 control measures (e.g., wearing masks, maintaining physical distancing protocols) when co-workers are around each other.

Work-related activities such as carpooling, gathering in the parking lot before or after work, driving together to get lunch, or sitting together while on a work break can all pose a risk of transmission. The area where workers park their personal vehicles may not be at the workplace, but it may be a common area where workers of multiple employers are likely to gather, making it challenging to maintain appropriate physical distancing.

A PC's Safety Plan should include how they, and the employers at their workplace, are advising workers to follow the appropriate protocols when socializing with co-workers on and off site.