

COVID-19 EXPLORATION FIELDWORK SAFETY GUIDELINES

This guide was developed by SGDS Hive and used with permission by AME. Information is up to date as of April 15, 2020. For further resources, visit amebc.ca/covid-19.

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COVID-19 AND EXPLORATION BACKGROUND

COVID-19 is a new form of infectious coronavirus that belongs to the same family as influenza and SARS. It is spread by contact with exhaled bodily fluids onto mucous membranes of another individual, commonly through coughing or sneezing. There is currently no vaccine and no cure for COVID-19 and so steps must be taken to prevent transmission.

The current state of emergency in British Columbia lasts to April 28, but this is likely to be extended, with restrictions on movement and workplaces lasting into the summer and possibly beyond.

Although gatherings of 50 or people are prohibited, even close contact work with two or three people can pose a risk of transmission and so this should be considered in the office or worksite.

The exploration and mining industries have been classified as an “essential service” in British Columbia as it feeds a critical supply chain. However, essential service does not mean that practices can continue without precautions and all activities should be restricted where possible, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic.

This document compiles information from several sources including WorkSafeBC, BC Centre for Disease Control and the Provincial Government to create a plan relevant to the mineral exploration industry. It is not a replacement for direction from medical authorities and should be used as a guide in conjunction with official advice and mandates issued by the Provincial Health Office or other such task forces whose updates need to be checked regularly.

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

The first responsibility of employers is to the health, safety and welfare of our staff as well as clients and contractors. This includes measures that will reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 either in the workplace or on site.

The following steps are recommended to ensure physical distancing is practiced in an enclosed workplace such as an office:

- Reconfiguring the workplace to maintain appropriate distances between workers
- Replacing in-person meetings with practices like teleconferences as an alternative when possible.
- Limiting all non-essential work travel
- Educating workers on health and safety measures to prevent transmission of infectious disease
- Increasing workplace cleaning, providing necessary supplies and reinforcing personal hygiene messages to workers
- Provision of thermometers for staff to take temperatures before heading into the field to join other crews. Daily monitoring is necessary, and recording is suggested. If your temperature is above 37.5°C it must be reported to the project manager.

In many cases, employees are able to work from home, and it should be remembered that many health and safety roles, rights and responsibilities are just as applicable at home as they are in the workplace.

EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Whether at home, in the field or in the office, the employee has responsibilities to their own health and safety as well as to their colleagues.

- If you or anyone in your household is showing COVID-19 like symptoms, you must self-isolate at home for a minimum of 14 days from the onset of symptoms, until the symptoms have completely resolved, and you have had no fever for 72 hours.
- If you have travelled internationally, you must remain away from the workplace for a minimum of 14 days, regardless if you are showing symptoms or not.
- In the workplace, employees should comply with all employer's instructions around minimizing exposure to COVID-19.
- Employees must wash their hands frequently for a minimum of 20 seconds, using soap and water or hand sanitizer (with a minimum 60% alcohol content).
- Take steps to minimize exposure to COVID-19 while away from work.

All employees have the right to refuse work if they believe it presents an undue hazard. This is defined as “an unwarranted, inappropriate, excessive, or disproportionate” risk, above and beyond the potential exposure a general member of the public would face through regular, day-to-day activity.

Steps should be followed to resolve the issue with their employer, starting by reporting the undue hazard for investigation. Employers then consider the refusal on a case-by-case basis, depending on the situation.

If the matter is unresolved, then the employee or employer must contact WorkSafeBC whereby a prevention officer will investigate and take steps to find a workable solution.

ESSENTIAL WORK ONLY

During this pandemic situation, fieldwork will initially be on an essential basis only (i.e. to complete site visits for reporting deadlines, collecting essential site information and monitoring of some projects for environmental or geotechnical reasons).

As COVID-19 transmission gets under control, it is likely that some restrictions will be relaxed making more general fieldwork possible. However, precautions will need to be considered and followed for the remainder of the year, and possibly longer, until vaccines are available.

The primary considerations for fieldwork currently are:

- Health and safety of staff and contractors.
- Avoiding small communities where possible, especially in more remote locations as an outbreak in these areas will rapidly overwhelm local medical practices and put strain on limited staff and supplies.
- Respecting rights of First Nations to allow access to sites within their traditional territories, lands and reserves. For the same concerns as with other small communities, some First Nations groups are issuing statements asking prospectors to not enter territories or communities or asking for check-ins so they can monitor who is working in the area. It is advisable to check websites of relative band or tribal councils to understand their protocols in place.
- With strain on the emergency services, reducing field activity also reduces risks of other non-COVID medical emergencies, search and rescue and wildfire management.

PLANNING FIELD WORK

Fieldwork activities should be planned in advance so that each member of the team understands the goals, their role and the revised procedures in place to limit exposure to COVID-19. Systems that were in place previously may need to be modified to reduce the possibility of transmission, such as two people working in proximity when collecting surface samples (i.e. one person sampling, one person making notes). It is advised that not only are these processes revised before field operations commence, but additional time is allowed on site to ensure new procedures are enacted successfully.

All workplace parties have responsibilities for ensuring that the work is planned, coordinated, and conducted in a manner that limits worker exposure to COVID-19.

Prime contractors must ensure that the activities of employers, workers, sub-contractors and other parties at the workplace are coordinated. The prime contractor must also do everything that is reasonably practicable to establish and maintain a system or process that will ensure compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and the Workers Compensation Act.

Mining and exploration employees and sub-contractors are responsible for ensuring the health and safety of workers by putting policies and procedures in place to keep workers healthy and safe, which includes instituting policies and procedures necessary to abide by orders and guidance from the Provincial Health Officer. They are also responsible for providing workers with up-to-date instructions, training, and supervision on those policies and procedures.

Prime contractors, employers, and sub-contractors must have a mechanism in place for workers to raise issues and concerns about COVID-19 exposure so that additional precautions and controls can be put in place where required.

CONTROLLING THE RISK OF COVID-19 EXPOSURE IN THE FIELD / WORKSITE

The following is adapted from WorkSafeBC guidelines for outdoor forestry, agriculture and construction worksites on how guidance and orders issued by the Provincial Health Officer might apply at their worksite.

- Maintain a distance of two meters between workers by revising work schedules, organizing work tasks, and limiting contact between people. *Examples would include suitable spacing when examining outcrops, having one person responsible for collecting samples at each site, suspending any work that requires two or more people to be in proximity.*
- Be aware that physical activity and exertion can lead to more rapid or deep breaths, so it is advised to ensure distances are respected to reduce the chance of coming into contact with respiratory droplets.
- Avoid large groups congregating in one area by reducing in-person meetings, and other gatherings. *However, safety briefings and other operational necessities should still be conducted with these restrictions in mind. This includes communal eating and meeting spaces.*
- If accommodations are required, one person per room should be implemented to allow for increased distance and control of personal hygiene.
- Provide portable handwashing stations in areas accessible to workers. Hand sanitizing stations equipped with gels or wipes or water jugs with soaps and disposable towels may be used where handwashing stations are impractical. Ensure all employees know where the facilities are located.
- Maintain a list of all employees who are currently working on a site, and update daily. This includes a log of any persons who might visit the site intermittently, such as expeditors, inspectors or other such persons.
- Clean all common areas and surfaces, including the inside of trucks, cabs, instruments, equipment and door handles at after each use, on arrival in the field and on arrival at camp / hotel or when the operator changes.

WORKER TRANSPORTATION

- Employers should assess the number of workers being transported at any one given time and employ measures to ensure distance between workers is maintained.
- Whenever possible, workers should travel alone in their vehicles in order to practice physical distancing. If that is the case, employers must implement all the necessary safeguards related to working alone or in isolation, to ensure the safety of these workers.
- Measures may be taken to ensure appropriate distance include having workers sit one to a seat and staggering them through the cab to allow maximum distance, adjusting the number of workers taken per trip, and the overall number of trips needed to transport workers to a worksite. It may mean using larger vehicles to ensure maximum spacing or using multiple vehicles.
- If it is not possible to ensure the 2 meters of distance between workers in a vehicle through these measures, the employer must consider other control measures, such as PPE where appropriate, or cancellation of the task to avoid risks.
- When riding in a vehicle it is advisable to wear a cloth mask out of an abundance of caution. This impedes the circulation of respiratory droplets on through the air, where air conditioning or open windows may spread it through the cab quicker or further than usual. Some are recommending the installation of HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate Air) filters into vehicles, although this is not likely feasible in many vehicles.
- If the vehicle is being rented / hired from a third party, never assume that the vehicle has been deep cleaned since the last user. As a minimum wipe down handles, seat belt buckles and door handles when you pick up the vehicle and then reserve time for a more thorough cleaning when possible. Using an alcohol-based solution works best for typical hard surfaces in vehicles, although the vehicle should be allowed to air out fumes properly before driving away.
- Employers must also implement a process that allows for physical distancing when loading or unloading vehicles.
- Employers should have handwashing facilities or supplies available to workers as they enter and exit vehicles.
- Employers must ensure that high contact areas within the vehicle are routinely cleaned. These include seatbelts, headrests, door handles, steering wheels and hand holds.
- Fueling vehicles should be done as sparingly as possible. Fill the fuel tank to the maximum possible as this will reduce the need for additional stops. Use a sanitizer on your hands after you get back in the vehicle but before you use the steering wheel.
- Paying at the pump also reduces contact with other surfaces and people and should be the preferred option where available.

EQUIPMENT HANDLING & INFORMATION PROCESSING

- All staff should be assigned their own equipment for exclusively use where possible. This includes field tools, GPS units, communication devices, writing tools, notebooks, laptops and other electronics.
- Where a piece of equipment is ‘unique’ (i.e. cameras, survey equipment etc.) then one member of staff should be designated to operate that for the duration of the project.
- All equipment should be cleaned regularly using soap and water, or in the case of electronics, alcohol wipes. Pay special attention to high-use surfaces, including keypads, touch screens or hand holds.
- Staff will process their own field data into spreadsheets, online recording sheets or other such systems. This prevents sharing of paper or notebooks from the field between team members. All originals should be retained by the employee, stored in an envelope or similar and then transported to the main office once the project is finished.
- Other tasks such as the submission of expenses will be done electronically. Images of receipts can be sent via email if required. All originals are to be retained by the employee in an envelope and transported to the main office once the project is finished. One person should be in charge of paying for items with a company credit or debit card.
- At the end of the project, all tools and equipment should be cleaned thoroughly and returned to storage.
- All documentation returning to the office will be set aside for a minimum of 5 days. The virus can survive usually for only a few minutes on paper surfaces, although some have been found to still be viable for up to 5 days.

The following chart provides a reference for the amount of time the virus is known to remain viable on different surfaces:

Surface	Examples	Viability Window
Metal	Door handles, seatbelt clips, chisels, hammers, digging tools	5 days
Wood	Furniture, staking posts, construction materials	4 days
Plastics	Packaging, ore bags, rubber grips, GPS units, touch screens	2 to 3 days
Stainless Steel	Pots and pans, cutlery, metal sample tags	2 to 3 days
Cardboard	Packaging, boxes, sample tag books	24 hours
Copper	Coins, tableware	4 hours
Aluminum	Soda cans, sample tags, scribes	2 to 8 hours
Glass	Drinking glasses, mirrors, windows	5 days
Ceramics	Tableware, dishes, insulators	5 days
Paper	Notebooks, receipts, sample tags	5 days

WORKER ACCOMMODATIONS

The following has been adapted from the BC Center for Disease Control document regarding [Guidelines for Industrial Camps](#).

- Provide information for staff staying in camps, hotels or other accommodations, including where to access the most up to date and accurate information about COVID-19 and prevention and control measures that are being implemented by the company to minimize transmission in the accommodations.
- Implement a “one person per room” policy. This reduces potential for exposure, allows better hygiene control and also provides isolation space should a person fall ill.
- Clean and disinfect regularly, even in places such as hotels where facility staff may be cleaning. This includes areas such as toilets, bedside tables, door handles and other high traffic areas. It is preferable that this is completed at least twice daily.
- Surfaces that become soiled with respiratory secretions or bodily fluids should be cleaned with an effective disinfectant, and it is advised to use protective clothing (such as gloves, aprons if available) when handling any soiled surfaces, linens or clothing.
- Continue good hand hygiene protocols. This is most important at the following times:
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - After coughing, sneezing or blowing one’s nose
 - Before and after contact with an ill person
 - After touching dirty surfaces such as taps and doorknobs and after going to the bathroom.
- Ensure safe food handling, especially if preparing or handling food for the group. It is encouraged that staff prepare their own meals and are provided their own set of plates, cups and cutlery. Other measures include:
 - Do not use self-service buffets or buy prepared food that is exposed (i.e. non-packaged bakery items). Other foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables should be well washed and rinsed where possible.
 - Minimize the handling of cutlery and other kitchen utensils between the group.
 - Remove shared food containers (i.e. shared pitchers of water, shared coffee pots, salt and pepper shakers etc.)
 - Use only pre-packaged snacks
 - Practice good hand hygiene when handling food.
 - Do not prepare food for yourself or others if you are feeling ill
 - Ensure all surfaces in the food preparation / eating areas are cleaned and disinfected after each meal. Pay attention to areas such as the underside edge of chair seats.
- It is advised that staff take enough clothing to ensure clean items can be worn each day. If laundry is required while working onsite, it should be carried in a disposable plastic bag or in a

cloth bag that is washed and dried with the laundry. Clothing can be washed using regular laundry soap and hot water (60-90°C), and then dried thoroughly. Remember to practice hand hygiene after handling laundry items.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL PLAN (CDCP)

The CDCP should provide details on the practices and policies that the company intends to implement for infection control and outline the roles and responsibilities of the individuals that will be involved in the communicable disease control processes.

NOTE: These are guidelines for small, transient crews. Projects with larger staffing requirements or remote camp sites should develop a more detailed plan. In these cases, the CDCP should be informed by a reasonable level of expertise in communicable disease control, and it is recommended it is developed in consultation with private healthcare providers. Further information can be found through [Northern Health](#).

The absolute minimum a site CDCP should contain is as follows:

- **Project location** (proximity of camp to nearby communities; population of nearby communities; frequency of contact between workers and communities);
- **Project timeline** (proposed dates for the various stages of the project);
- **Anticipated number of employees** (working at camp and housed at camp);
- **Demographics and health care status of workers** (if available);
- **Where workers are coming from** (local, regional, provincial or international);
- **Turnover patterns and work shifts** (Do they fly in/fly out? How long are their shifts/rotations?);
- **Overview of camp set-up** (description of camp facilities including the number of rooms, room occupancy, number of showers and washrooms, dining and community areas, and recreational facilities such as gyms, pool tables, television rooms, etc.);
- **Location of the nearest acute health care facility;** and
- **Whether any medical device reprocessing is completed on-site** (e.g. disinfection and sterilization of respiratory equipment, etc.)

SICKNESS AND FIRST AID

If an employee starts to exhibit COVID-19 symptoms while working, they should be allowed to self isolate and call the 8-1-1 for further advice. Advise the rest of the team that a person is currently isolated. Note that at this time the sick person may need to provide additional information about the work situation, colleagues and movements to Health Authorities, so having that recorded as part of a standard safety plan is recommended.

A standard medevac plan needs to be completed for all project sites, although additional research should be added for the nearest facilities with emergency departments / ventilators who can best deal with suspected cases or those in respiratory distress.

It is possible that the sick person may need to be transported home, in which case the transportation protocols listed above should be followed.

The need for First Aid on site should be minimized at all times under regular management protocols and diligence, however accidents and incidents can still happen and so the usual procedures for dealing with potential communicable diseases should be followed. First Aid kits must contain gloves and facemasks (N95 if possible). Additional items such as eye protection and gowns are also advisable. This procedure would be in effect regardless if the person was showing symptoms of COVID-19 or not.

CHECKLISTS

VEHICLES

- Alcohol-based wipes for surfaces
- Hand sanitizer
- Water jug & soap for hand washing on site
- Paper / disposable towels
- First Aid Kits

PERSONAL EFFECTS

- Daily clothing changes
- Basic cloth face mask
- Hand sanitizer
- Paper / disposable towels
- Personal First Aid Kit
- Assigned set of plates, cups and utensils
- Personal thermometer for recording body temperature

PERSONAL FIELD KITS

- GPS Unit
- Radio / InReach or other communication device
- Assigned hammer & chisel and other field tools
- Safety glasses
- Personal First Aid Kit
- Supply of sample bags and tags