

## Safe Practices During BC's Second Wave: A Checklist for Managing Brokers

British Columbia is now in the second wave of COVID-19 infections. With a new public health order in effect limiting the number of people gathering in a private residence to six in addition to occupants, it is important for managing brokers to review their safety plans and understand what new measures are needed to continue protecting consumers and help slow transmission.

With that in mind, the British Columbia Real Estate Association, the Office of the Superintendent of Real Estate and the Real Estate Council of British Columbia have updated the original "Return to Safe Work Plan: A Checklist For Managing Brokers" to reflect the revised public health order and new joint recommendations from our organizations. As our organizations are again recommending against the practice of open houses, we have removed open house-related guidance. The new guidance is highlighted and can be found under the heading "[Develop practice guidance on safe showings](#)".

Whenever possible, we must continue to prioritize virtual/remote options over in-person/office interactions, while encouraging the wearing of masks, ensuring physical distancing and maintaining high sanitization standards in the workplace. Above all, we must ensure staff and REALTORS® understand the serious consequences of working in the office or with clients if they are experiencing any symptoms or have been in contact with anyone experiencing [symptoms linked to COVID-19](#).

### STEP 1: ASSESS YOUR WORKPLACE

- Determine changes needed to your office to create a safe workplace.**
  - Have you reviewed the most recent practice guidelines provided by [WorkSafeBC](#) and developed with the Public Health Officer?
  - How many people can you allow in your office and still maintain [safe physical distancing](#) (two metres distance at all times)?
  - How will you [ensure physical distancing](#) in shared spaces like meeting rooms, elevators, kitchens and break rooms and washrooms?
  - How can you plan and direct traffic flow in your office to ensure physical distancing?
  - Does the layout of cubicles, workspaces and offices allow for physical distancing? What needs to change?
  - Will you need plexiglass shields/dividers at any workspaces?

- Does your reception/entrance area allow for physical distancing?

**Plan for [business continuity](#).**

- Do your brokerage's goals and financial projections need to be changed?
- What will you do if you or someone in your office is sick or quarantined for an extended period? What cross-training is needed? Have you updated your sick leave policies?
- Have you reviewed the most recent [government support](#) programs available for your business or staff?
- Has COVID-19 changed any employee roles/duties or organizational structure? Are these changes sustainable? Have you discussed these changes with your staff?
- How can you ensure cyber security is maintained when staff are working remotely and using more virtual technology?

## STEP 2: DEVELOP A SAFE WORK PLAN FOR YOUR OFFICES

**Develop policies [to ensure health, safety and hygiene](#).**

- Does your landlord/property manager have policies you must comply with?
- What are your policies regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)? Will you require that all staff wear PPE? If so, you are required as an employer to provide it.
- Will Realtors be required to wear PPE when in the office? Will your brokerage or your Realtors provide it?
- What other protection and cleaning products such as disinfectant wipes/spray, hand sanitizers and tissues will you provide? How will you ensure easy access to these items at all desks and workspaces?
- How will you plan for a stable supply of Public Health Officer approved sanitizers, personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves and masks, as well as soap, paper products etc. given shortages and potential postal delays?
- How will you ensure [frequent cleaning](#) of shared workspaces (hot-desking) and high-touch surfaces like light switches, door handles, alarms, whiteboards, phones, photocopiers, documents, coffee machines, fridges, water coolers, etc.?
- What are your protocols for staff and visitors regarding [frequently washing and/or sanitizing](#) their hands?
- What else can you do to minimize transmission risks (e.g. temperature checks, removal of personal items from desks, removal of shared items like coffee, remote controls, etc.)?
- Do staff and Realtors understand that physical contact (handshakes or hugs) is unsafe?

**Prepare your office.**

- What protective measures need to be installed (plexiglass shields)?
- What signage is needed to ensure frequent hand & surface cleaning, safe traffic flow and to remind staff/inform visitors of policies?
- What equipment/tools can you remove to minimize transmission risks (ex. remote controls, whiteboard markers, etc.)?
- Are changes needed to mechanical, HVAC, and fire/life safety systems?
- What safety procedures should staff and Realtors know BEFORE they return to the office?

- As many Realtors work from their cars, how will you encourage Realtors to frequently sanitize their vehicles?
- Develop plan to manage confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19.**
- How will staff and Realtors report exposure or suspected exposure?
  - Who will you need to inform of suspected or confirmed cases (public health authorities, staff, Realtors and consumers)? How will you [protect confidentiality](#)?
  - How will you ensure self isolation/quarantine requirements are met?
  - How can you plan for business continuity if your office is closed for sanitization or if staff are unable to work because they have a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19?
  - How will you sanitize your office? Have you discussed sanitation practices with your office cleaners?
- Develop [HR policies](#) and staff supports.**
- What policies do you need to support sick leaves and self-isolating, including for those caring for sick/self-isolating family members?
  - How will you ensure staff and Realtors stay home if they have *any* symptoms of illness related to COVID-19, or if they have been in contact with someone with these symptoms, even if they feel well (as required by the BC Centre for Disease Control)?
  - What support do staff and Realtors need who can't work in the office due to underlying health issues or child/elder care issues?
  - Can you adjust schedules to minimize the number of staff and Realtors in the office at the same time (e.g. half-days, specific schedules for Realtors, staggered start/finish times)?
  - How can you support your staff's and Realtors' mental health and help manage anxiety?
  - Can you offer staff and Realtor parking options to reduce commuting by public transit?
  - How will you minimize business travel? Will staff and Realtors report personal travel?
- Develop visitor policies.**
- How do you ensure visitors don't put your office at risk?
  - Will you ask visitors to confirm they are symptom-free and have not been in contact with anyone with symptoms before entering your office? How will you prevent visitors from entering the premises before they have made these confirmations?
  - How will you collect contact information in case contact tracing is needed?
  - How many visitors can you have and still meet physical distancing requirements?
  - Will you expect visitors to use PPE? Who will provide it? What will you do if visitors refuse to comply with your policies?
  - How will deliveries be handled safely?

### STEP 3: ADAPT REAL ESTATE PRACTICES

- Develop physical distancing policies to ensure compliance with public health orders when working with consumers.**
- How can you continue to prioritize remote transactions by using virtual showing platforms and electronic signatures?

- Have you considered purchasing additional technology to support remote and/or virtual working, as physical distancing requirements could be in place for some time?
- How can you provide guidance to your Realtors to ensure consumers are pre-qualified before meeting in person or viewing a property?
- How will you provide guidance to Realtors on safe physical distancing if any in-person showings are held?
- What information about safety needs to be communicated to consumers at the outset of a Realtor/client relationship to ensure compliance?
- Do your Realtors understand that they should not drive consumers to showings? How will this be communicated to consumers in advance? What should Realtors do if they feel pressured to drive consumers that do not own a vehicle and do not want to take public transportation?

**Develop practice guidance on safe showings.**

- How will you communicate to Realtors that scheduled in-person showings should be held only with serious buyers who intend to make an offer on a property?
- What conversations do you need to have with Realtors to ensure they understand the public health order mandating that, in addition to occupants, a maximum of six people (including Realtors) can be present at a private residence (inside and outside) during a showing?
- How will you ensure occupants are not present during a showing and any pets are safely confined?
- Where occupants elect to stay in the property, what conversations do you need to have with Realtors to ensure they effectively manage visitor numbers, and physical distancing in a property?
- Remind Realtors that when a single property contains multiple private residences with different numbers of occupants, they will need to plan accordingly to ensure physical distancing and public health orders are adhered to.
- Remind Realtors that the size of the private residence will also determine how many visitors can attend a showing. In some cases, six people may be too many to ensure physical distancing inside and outside the private residence.
- With masks now strongly recommended by the Public Health Officer, how will you further encourage Realtors and consumers to wear masks? Who will provide them?
- If the seller mandates that masks be worn, how will you ensure buyers are aware of and can meet this requirement?
- What guidance will you give Realtors in instances when a seller does not require or does not insist on the use of masks for some or all visitors?
- What guidance will you give to Realtors to help ensure visitors do not congregate outside the private residence before, during or after showings? Be mindful that neighbours may be very sensitive to this issue.
- How will you ensure your Realtors are prepared if clients require PPE? Who will provide it?
- How will you ensure Realtors ask consumers to confirm they have no symptoms of illness related to COVID-19, have not been in contact with anyone with symptoms before

**attending an in-person showing and have not been placed under a mandatory quarantine due to travel or other reasons?**

- How will you ensure consumers understand they must cancel appointments if they are showing any symptoms related to COVID-19?
- What guidance will you give Realtors on providing services within their area of expertise, including working in the communities they typically serve?
- How will Realtors work with consumers who own tenanted properties to ensure tenants' rights are respected and tenants freely give consent? What additional policies does your brokerage need to ensure tenant safety?
- **Are you up to date with the latest guidelines from the Residential Tenancy Branch and/or any new Residential Tenancy Orders?**
- What guidance can you provide Realtors regarding safe traffic flow throughout the property? What policies will you develop for Realtors regarding WorkSafeBC signage recommendations?
- What guidance will you provide Realtors and clients on sanitizing or washing their hands before and after entering a property?
- What guidance will you provide to help ensure proper sanitization of a property before and after a showing? Who will be responsible for sanitization?
- What guidance will you give Realtors on scheduling viewings to allow for proper sanitization between viewings?
- What guidance will you provide Realtors on sanitizing high-touch items such as keys and lockboxes?
- What steps will you take if a seller refuses to sanitize a property?
- What recommendations will you make on reducing cross-contamination risks if consumers view multiple properties in one day?
- How will your brokerage and Realtors plan for and respond to safety concerns/criticism about showings from neighbours or tenants (in-person or on social media)?

**Determine what new documentation or changes to existing documentation are needed.**

- Are your Schedule "A's" still representative of the services the brokerage is contracting to provide? What needs to be updated?
- Will you be using additional waivers or clauses related to COVID-19? How will you ensure consumers understand who they benefit and seek legal advice before signing?
- What legal advice does your brokerage need in drafting or reviewing offers with COVID-19 specific clauses to ensure they are transaction and client-specific?

**Provide guidance to Realtors on brokerage expectations.**

- What can you do to make sure Realtors keep up-to-date with changes to procedures (regular remote attendance of office meetings, electronic communications, signage)?
- How can you support Realtors in identifying and avoiding risky situations?

**Provide guidance to Realtors on supporting consumers through completion.**

- How can you support Realtors in ensuring clients understand changes to related services like home inspectors, appraisers and moving companies?

## STEP 4: ENSURE COMPLIANCE

- Develop plan to train staff and Realtors on new policies and procedures and ensure compliance.**
  - How will you monitor compliance, respond to concerns or deal with non-compliance?
  - Who will be responsible for monitoring compliance in your office?  
How will you ensure Realtors follow safety procedures while working outside the office?
  
- Develop plan to monitor and adapt to changes to public health guidance.**
  - How will you keep up-to-date and share changes to public health guidance with your staff and Realtors?

## Planning Resources

The information is based on current recommendations and may change. For the latest guidance, please see the following websites:

- [British Columbia Centre for Disease Control](#) for health information
- [Government of British Columbia](#) for the latest news
- [Office of the Provincial Health Officer](#) for the latest orders
- [WorkSafe BC COVID-19](#) for advice on returning to work safely
- [BCREA for COVID-19 Resources for Realtors](#)
- [RECBC guidance for real estate professionals](#)