

Guide to Re-opening your business . . .

The BC government has never mandated that all businesses must shut down. They did declare that the following businesses must close:

- All businesses that cannot maintain a minimum social distance of 1-2 meters between patrons
- Restaurants (except for take-out/delivery; also allowed to use servers to deliver liquor products)
- Bars, pubs and nightclubs
- Entertainment venues (theatres, concert halls, etc.)
- Casinos
- Personal service establishments (barbershops, hair and nail salons, tattoo shops, spas, etc.)

Other businesses had the choice to stay open as long as they could adapt services and workplaces to meet the orders and recommendations of the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry.

Many businesses across BC voluntarily shut down to help stop the spread and others realized that trying to remain open was not financially viable due to a significant drop in revenue. Some businesses who chose to remain open have experienced push back from community members who think that all non-essential businesses were ordered to close or should have closed to protect the community. There remain mixed feelings from the customer base as well as the business community as to who, what, when, where, why and how we can safely attempt to re-start our economy.

Steps to re-opening

As a small business owner, there are a number of steps that you need to consider in regards to planning for your re-opening.

1. Know the risks. Risk assessment includes identifying the hazards, deciding who may be harmed and how and assessing the likelihood and the ramifications if an identified risk occurs. Conduct your own risk assessment and weigh the risks in regards to:
 - staff
 - consumers

- to business – financial losses, compliance requirements, liability, employee safety, business disruptions, reputation harm, etc.
2. Develop plans, policies and procedures for risk mitigation. Ensure compliance with all Worksafe & Provincial guidelines including:
 - Staff training on new protocols
 - Cough and sneeze etiquette
 - Cleaning and disinfecting
 - Ensuring ill employees stay home
 - Separation and screening
 - Social distancing
 - Handwashing education and provisions
 - Sick leave policies
 - Travel policies
 - Municipal requirements may also exist in regards to operating safely
 - Worksafe BC: <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/health-and-safety/what-employers-should-do>
 - Provincial Government: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>
 3. Changes in consumer patterns – this pandemic has caused rapid change in consumer demand, habits and expectations. You cannot expect it to be “business as usual” when you re-open. How will this new reality impact your business?
 4. Supply chain disruptions – investigate your current and/or alternative supply chains to ensure that you will be able to get required inventory or supplies.
 5. Cash Flow – plan various cash flow projections based on pessimistic, expected and optimistic cases for example:
 - Pessimistic ~35% reduction in revenue, 12 months for recovery to start
 - Expected ~25% reduction in revenue, 6 months for recovery to start
 - Optimistic ~15% reduction in revenue, 4 months for recovery to start
 6. Plan your staffing requirements.
 - Identify the skill sets required in the short term and the anticipated need as business gradually increases.
 - Ensure that there is sufficient cash flow to pay employees prior to their recall.
 - It’s important to be aware that some employees may be at higher risk for serious illness, such as older adults and those with chronic medical conditions. You may also have employees that will experience issues with lack of childcare and school disruptions. Have an open and honest dialogue with your staff in regards to their ability to return to work.
 - It may be a long time before you will return to pre-covid staffing levels

- Consider the Provincial Labour standards act and your obligations to staff regarding staff requested leave of absence due to covid <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards/time-off> and also the obligation to pay severance pay if lay offs go beyond 16 weeks (new temporary measure if lay off is due to covid). <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards/forms-resources/igm/esr-part-7-section-45-01>

7. Develop an internal and an external communications plan.

- Internal – Transparent and regular communication with your staff is essential in this time of uncertainty. As a leader, you are key to helping people stay calm, focused and engaged. Be clear and plan for the intentional redundancy of your message. Focus on the facts, but also be human and demonstrate empathy. Bring people together and help them expand their focus. Give concrete suggestions and make pragmatic requests. You need to be clear about the present, but also focus on the future and help people find hope in the chaos.
- External – marketing messages need to change. You need our customers to know:
 - That you ARE open for business
 - That their safety is of primary concern
 - What protocols you have in place to ensure their safety
 - Alternative ways to obtain goods & services from your business if they feel unsafe coming in person