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British Columbia News

Province takes unprecedented steps to support COVID-19 response

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/21885>

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Victoria - Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, is using extraordinary powers under a state of provincial emergency to keep British Columbians safe, maintain essential goods and services, and support the Province's ongoing response to novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

"B.C. is in a strong position to effectively respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic," said Farnworth. "Informed by the direction of the provincial health officer, we're taking these critical steps to keep our communities safe, goods moving and essential service workers supported."

Using the extraordinary powers under the Emergency Program Act, the minister is issuing a series of ministerial orders to ensure a co-ordinated response to COVID-19 across all levels of government for the duration of the provincial emergency. These include:

- **Supply chain:** Establishing a new Provincial Supply Chain Coordination Unit to co-ordinate goods and services distribution; taking a more active role in co-ordinating essential goods and services movement by land, air, marine and rail; and suspending any bylaws that restrict goods delivery at any time of day.
- **Protecting consumers:** Banning the secondary resale of food, medical supplies, personal protective equipment, cleaning and other essential supplies; and restricting quantities of items purchased at point of sale.
- **Enforcement:** Enabling municipal bylaw officers to support enforcement of the provincial health officer's orders for business closures and gatherings, in line with offences under the Public Health Act.
- **Travel:** Ensuring **all passenger and car-ferry services** provide minimum service levels and priority access for residents, and essential goods and workers.
- **Protecting B.C.'s most vulnerable:** Making it easier to support critical services for vulnerable people, like food banks and shelters.
- **Co-ordination:** Suspending local states of emergency specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, except for the City of Vancouver; giving municipal councils the ability to hold more flexible meetings to expedite decisions; and co-ordinating potential use of local publicly owned facilities, like community centres, for self-isolation, testing, medical care, warehousing and distribution.

These unprecedented steps, made based on the recommendation of B.C.'s health and emergency management officials and invoked for the first time under a provincial state of emergency, will support the provincial health officer and minister of health in a co-ordinated cross-government approach to COVID-19 response and recovery.

Farnworth added, "Many local governments, First Nations and partners have stepped up to make sure they have prepared to protect their communities from the impacts of COVID-19. Today's measures will make sure communities are taking necessary steps, in co-ordination with the Province, to get ready should more action be required to combat COVID-19."

The Province, in consultation with the Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s provincial health officer, has defined essential services British Columbians rely on in their daily lives in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery. This is distinct from essential service designations under the Province's Labour Relations Code.

In consultation with the provincial health officer, any business or service that has not been ordered to close, and is also not identified on the essential service list, may stay open if it can adapt its services and workplace to the orders and recommendations of the PHO.

“In these new and challenging times we are facing, we’re asking British Columbians to stay strong as a community, and together we can get through this,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “I’m proud of the strategic measures we have enacted government-wide to help our families and health-care workers, to keep them safe and supported. By issuing a series of ministerial orders, we recognize that this is not forever, but it is for now. With everyone stepping in and respecting the extraordinary means we have to take, we will overcome this.”

Farnworth declared a provincial state of emergency on March 18, 2020, after the provincial health officer declared a public health emergency on March 17. The Province previously declared states of emergency in 1998, 2003, 2017 and 2018 – all related to wildfires. In each of those previous declarations, necessary actions were able to be taken without issuing minister’s orders under the Emergency Program Act.

Quick Facts:

- Declarations of provincial states of emergency may be issued by the minister responsible under the Emergency Program Act.
- The provincial government can extend the period of a declaration made by the minister responsible for further periods of time.
- During the 2017 wildfire season, the Province was in a provincial state of emergency for 10 weeks from July 7 to Sept. 15.

Learn More:

For recommendations on protecting yourself and your community, including for employers and businesses, visit: [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-\(novel\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel))

For the COVID-19 pandemic preparedness and planning materials, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/pandemic-influenza>.

For more information and latest medical updates on COVID-19, follow the BC Centre for Disease Control on Twitter @CDCofBC or visit its website: <http://www.bccdc.ca/>

For more information on non-medical issues like travel recommendations and how to manage social isolation, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/COVID-19

Two backgrounders follow.

Media Contacts

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Backgrounders

Extraordinary powers of the Emergency Program Act

On March 18, 2020, a provincial state of emergency was declared under the Emergency Program Act (EPA) to support the provincial health officer and minister of health in the timely and effective provincial response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This declaration will make sure federal, provincial and local resources are delivered in a joint, co-ordinated effort to best protect British Columbians.

Under a provincial state of emergency, the minister of public safety and solicitor general has extraordinary powers under the EPA to take steps necessary to prevent, respond or alleviate the impacts of an emergency.

These powers, issued by ministerial order, include the means to secure critical supply chains, ensure people have access to essential goods and services to keep society running, and make sure critical infrastructure and materials are readily available to support COVID-19 response and public safety orders are enforced.

Ministerial orders using the extraordinary powers of the EPA support a government-wide approach to COVID-19 response and recovery throughout the state of emergency, and are guided by the Pandemic Provincial Coordination Plan.

Maintaining the supply chain for essential goods and services

- A new, Provincial Supply Chain Coordination Unit will co-ordinate goods and services distribution in partnership with industry.
- The Province will take a more active role in co-ordinating essential goods and services movement by land, air, marine and rail. All air services required to transport essential goods, services or personnel shall be managed through establishing of a Coordinated Provincial Air Service.
- Any bylaws that restrict goods delivery at any time of day are suspended.
- The Province will identify and take control of warehouses and other facilities for gathering supplies and resources if required.

Protecting Consumers

- The resale of food, medical supplies, personal protective equipment, cleaning products and other essential supplies is prohibited.
- The Province will work with retailers and industry to restrict quantities of certain items purchased at point of sale to make sure there is enough supply for those who need them.

Enforcement

- Municipal bylaw officers are enabled to be re-deployed to support enforcement of the provincial health officer's orders and directives carrying fines of **over \$25,000** or jail, to be determined by the courts under the authority of the Public Health Act.

Travel

- Direct passenger and car ferry operators, in consultation with the Province, will provide minimum

service levels and priority access for residents, and essential goods and workers.

Protecting the most vulnerable

- Regulatory and administrative barriers will be removed to make it easier to support critical services for vulnerable people, like food banks and shelters.
- Evictions due to loss of income related to COVID-19 that would otherwise be allowed under the Residential Tenancy Act will be prevented or suspended.

Better emergency response and recovery co-ordination

- **All orders issued under local states of emergency under COVID-19 will be suspended** and local governments will activate their emergency plans.
- The City of Vancouver's state of emergency orders remain. Going forward, the city will require permission to issue further new orders under its state of emergency.
- Public facilities, like community centres, will be identified to be used for pandemic response: self-isolation, testing, medical care, warehousing and distribution.
- Mutual aid agreements will be put in place for first responders.
- Local governments will be given the ability to hold more flexible meetings to expedite decisions.
- Local governments will be directed to develop business continuity plans and advanced planning for other emergencies, such as freshet flooding and wildfires.

Additional measures

- On the direction of the Province, a hotel operator or commercial lodging operator must provide accommodation services for the purposes of self-isolation, supporting essential workforces or for other purposes identified by the Province.

Ministerial orders issued under the Emergency Program Act can be found here:

<http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/content/mo/mo/1115649140/?xsl=/templates/browse.xsl>

List of essential services in B.C. during COVID-19 pandemic

Essential services are those daily services essential to preserving life, health, public safety and basic societal functioning. They are the services British Columbians rely on in their daily lives.

Developed by Emergency Management BC in consultation with other government ministries and the provincial health officer (PHO), this definition is intended to clarify what qualifies as an essential service in the context of the Province's response to COVID-19. In consultation with the PHO, these services should and are encouraged to remain open. They must, however, follow the orders and guidance provided by the PHO to ensure safe operations and reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

The PHO has ordered some types of businesses to close. Any business or service that has not been ordered to close, and is also not identified on the essential service list, may stay open if it can adapt its services and workplace to the orders and recommendations of the PHO.

Child care providers and schools providing care and/or in-class instruction for children are to prioritize placements for those children whose parents are employed as front-line workers in direct to public health and health services, social services, law enforcement, first responders and emergency response.

A list of essential services follows.

Health and health services

Direct-to-public health services

- all health-care services, including acute care (hospitals), secondary/long-term care, coroners' services, health-care providers working within and outside an acute care setting and other health services, including public health, detox facilities, safe-injection sites, COVID-19 testing, clinical research supporting the COVID-19 response, blood/plasma donation services and emergency pre-hospitalization services;
- other health services and caregivers (e.g., physicians, dentists, psychiatrists, psychologists, mid-level practitioners, nurses and assistants, infection-control and quality-assurance personnel, pharmacists, physical and occupational therapists and assistants, social workers, mental-health and substance-use workers, including peer support workers, speech pathologists, diagnostic and therapeutic technicians and technologists, counsellors, chiropractors, naturopaths, dentists, crisis centres, outreach workers, overdose and harm-reduction services, meal programs; and
- health first responders (paramedics).

Health service providers

- pharmaceutical production, medical laboratories/research, medical testing, pharmacies, medical supply and equipment manufacturers, wholesale, distribution and stores, and analytical testing labs related to testing of finished product for pathogens and contaminants;
- safety supply (e.g., work clothes, personal protective equipment, medical/pharmaceutical/laboratory supplies, etc.) stores, manufacturers, technicians, logistics and warehouse operators;
- medical wholesale and distribution; and
- health plans, billing and health information.

Law enforcement, public safety, first responders, emergency response personnel

- first responders, including police, fire and those services providing for public safety, including commercial vehicle safety enforcement, corrections and detainment facilities, park rangers, security and protective services, court services, bylaw enforcement, as well as communications/dispatching support for first responders and volunteers, such as search-and-rescue and public-safety lifeline volunteers;
- public-sector workers for peace, order and good government, and employees of contracted service providers in these fields, including maintenance of technical infrastructure to support this work and compliance with health and public-safety orders;
- businesses that provide support to police and correctional services;
- operations and services in support of the Canadian Armed Forces and Canadian Border Services Agency;
- emergency management personnel at local, regional and provincial levels;
- businesses that ensure global continuity of supply of aggregates to support critical infrastructure repairs and emergency response requirements (e.g., sandbags, armour stone barriers, etc.); and
- equipment and uniform suppliers for first responders.

Vulnerable population service providers

- businesses and non-profits that provide food, shelter, social and support services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable individuals, such as:
 - food banks, community kitchens, and voluntary and community service providers;

- residential health facilities, mental-health, substance-use and addictions services;
- transitional, social and supportive housing, and single-room occupancy housing;
- community services and outreach for immigrants, refugees, vulnerable populations and non-market housing, including businesses that sell, rent or repair assistive/mobility/medical devices, aids and/or supplies;
- care for seniors, adults, children or individuals with disabilities;
- child care services for those persons providing essential services;
- caregivers for children in care and out of care;
- elder and disability care, including disabled service support for people with physical and cognitive disabilities;
- residential care for individuals with mental health and substance use challenges, including licensed and registered treatment and recovery facilities;
- government and non-profit service delivery staff who provide access to income supports for people in need of food and shelter;
- residential and care facilities and shelters for seniors, adults, children and people with disabilities;
- overdose prevention sites, clinical overdose prevention services or medical marijuana provision; and
- businesses that sell, rent or repair assistive/mobility/medical devices, aids and/or supplies, or other products/services that support the health sector, including mental-health and addictions/counselling supports.

Critical infrastructure service providers

- infrastructure, drilling and production, refineries, processing, completion facilities, utilities, transportation, transmission, stations and storage facilities critical in supporting daily essential electricity needs, drinking water, waste water, electricity (including associated infrastructure), steam, alternative energy production, waste and hazardous management, industrial recycling, oil and natural and propane gas, fuel and other fuel sources, such as heating oil and wood pellets, as well as operating staff;
- manufacturing of goods necessary for the continued and immediate operation of other essential infrastructure and businesses;
- gas stations, diesel, propane and heating fuel providers including providers of motor vehicle, aircraft and water/marine fuels, and providers of charging stations for electric vehicles; and
- operations and employees needed to operate and maintain drinking water and wastewater/drainage infrastructure, including:
 - operational staff at water authorities;
 - operational staff at community water systems;
 - operational staff at wastewater treatment facilities;
 - workers repairing water and wastewater conveyances and performing required sampling or monitoring;
 - operational staff for water distribution and testing;
 - operational staff at wastewater collection facilities;
 - operational staff and technical support for supervisory control and data-acquisition control systems;
 - chemical disinfectant suppliers for wastewater and personnel protection; and
 - workers who maintain digital systems infrastructure supporting water and wastewater operations.

Food and agriculture service providers

- food cultivation, including farming, livestock, aquaculture and fishing, and businesses that support

- the food supply chain, as well as community gardens and subsistence agriculture;
- food processing, manufacturing, storage and distribution of foods, feed products and beverages;
- workers essential to maintaining or repairing equipment in food processing and distribution centres;
- workers, including temporary foreign workers, to support agricultural operations to enhance food security;
- retail: grocery stores, convenience stores, farmers markets and other establishments engaged in the retail sale or provision of food, pet or livestock supply, liquor, cannabis (including producers), and any other household consumer products, such as cleaning and personal care products.
 - includes stores that sell groceries and also sell other non-grocery products, and products necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation and essential daily operation of residences. such as home supply, hardware, building material stores, pawn brokers, and garden centres and nurseries;
- farming supply, including seed, fertilizer, pesticides, farm-machinery sales and maintenance;
- inspection services and associated regulatory and government workforce and supporting businesses required for slaughter of animals, dairy production and food safety; and
- businesses that provide for the health and welfare of animals, including veterinarians, farms, boarding kennels, stables, animal shelters, zoos, aquariums, research facilities and other service providers.

Transportation, infrastructure and manufacturing

- supply chain services needed to supply goods for societal functioning, including cooling, storing, packaging, transportation, warehousing and distribution;
- workers who support the maintenance and operation of cargo transportation services, including crews, maintenance, operations and other facilities workers;
- manufacturers and distributors (to include service centres and related operations) of packaging materials, pallets, crates, containers and other supplies needed to support manufacturing, packaging staging and distribution operations;
- truck drivers who haul hazardous and waste materials to support critical infrastructure, capabilities, functions, and municipal and provincial services;
- local, regional, and provincial delivery services, including but not limited to businesses that ship or deliver groceries, food, goods or services directly to business and residences and mailing and shipping services;
- services to support and enable transportation, including highway, road, bridge maintenance and repair;
- employees who repair, maintain and overhaul vehicles, aircraft and parts, rail equipment, marine vessels, and the equipment and infrastructure that enables operations that encompass movement of cargo and passengers, as well as vehicle rentals and leasing;
- services that facilitate the transportation of essential supplies, personnel and services, including port/waterfront operations, road, air and rail operations;
- facilities supporting interprovincial and intra-provincial delivery of goods, including truck scales, commercial vehicle inspection stations, brokerages, truck towing and repair services, commercial cardlock fuel providers, truck and rest stops;
- government-owned or leased buildings;
- businesses that supply other essential businesses and people working from home with the support or supplies necessary to operate;
- private transportation services, such as taxis, ride-hailing, helicopter, aircraft and marine vessels;
- public transportation services under rules for physical distancing or other recommendations from the PHO;
- workers supporting the chemical and industrial gas supply chains, including workers at chemical manufacturing plants, workers in laboratories, workers at distribution facilities, workers who

transport basic raw chemical materials to the producers of industrial and consumer goods and support the natural resource sector, as well as workers supporting safety at such facilities;

- provision of public services that support the safe operation of regulated businesses and the provision of public services that support those businesses to meet other regulatory requirements;
- workers who support the operation, inspection, and maintenance of essential public works facilities and operations;
- workers who support the inspection and maintenance for ongoing safety at industrial facilities;
- inspectors who ensure worksites are safe and health for workers, and who investigate serious workplace accidents;
- workers who process and manage claims made by injured workers, including services related to their care and treatment, as well as the provision of workers' compensation benefits;
- hotels and places of accommodation;
- activities of the consuls general and staff who support the work of the consuls general;
- landlords of buildings where the consulates are located and those who must guarantee access to consular offices as well as the operation of the consular offices;
- storage for essential businesses;
- businesses that provide materials and services for the operation, maintenance and safety of transportation systems (road, transit, rail, air and marine) including delivery of maintenance services, such as clearing snow, response to collisions and completing needed repairs to transportation systems;
- businesses that extract, manufacture, process and distribute goods, products, equipment and materials, including businesses that manufacture inputs to other manufacturers (e.g., primary metal/steel, blow moulding, component manufacturers, chemicals, etc., that feed the end-product manufacturer);
- vegetation management crews and traffic workers who support environmental remediation/monitoring and who respond to environmental emergencies;
- businesses providing staffing services, including temporary labour services; and
- businesses that support the safe operations of residences, essential businesses and facilities/buildings.

Sanitation

- cleaning services necessary to provide and maintain disinfection;
- manufacturing of sanitary products, household paper products, chemicals, microelectronics/semi-conductor, including companies able to retrofit their production facilities to produce goods/services that can be used to address critical shortages of sanitary and protective goods;
- businesses that support environmental management/monitoring and spill cleanup and response, including environmental consulting firms, professional engineers and geoscientists, septic haulers, well drillers, pesticides applicators and exterminators, management of industrial sewage/effluent (e.g., for mining operations) and environmental laboratories; and
- waste (garbage and organics) and recycling collection, processing and disposal.

Communications, information sharing and information technology (IT)

- workers maintaining IT and communications infrastructure for medical facilities, governments facilities, emergency response and command agencies, energy and utilities, banks and financial institutions, employees working from home, and other critical infrastructure categories and personnel, including managing information and cyber-security incidents;
- newspapers, television, radio, online news outlets and other media services;
- IT, radio, cable providers and telecommunications services, including phone, internet, wireless communications and data centres; and

- satellite operations, undersea cable landing stations, internet exchange points, and manufacturers and distributors of communications equipment.

Non-health essential service providers

- feed, water, bedding, veterinary care, veterinary supply, transport and processing services for livestock, animal shelters and pets;
- coroners and workers performing mortuary services, including funeral homes, crematoriums and cemeteries, as well as workers supporting the appropriate handling, identification, storage, transportation and certification of human remains;
- banks and their branches, credit unions and related financial institutions, as well as workers who support security and technical operations supporting financial institutions;
- capital markets, including the British Columbia Securities Commission, self-regulatory organizations, exchanges, clearing agencies and investment-fund dealers, advisers and managers;
- services related to bankruptcy/credit restructuring and non-bank sources of capital, cheque-cashing outlets, money sending and money remittance services, currency exchange services, pawn brokers;
- accounting, payroll, translation services, legal services and insurance providers; insurance assessment and adjudication providers;
- plumbers, electricians, elevator maintenance providers, exterminators, property management services, custodial/janitorial workers, cleaning services, fire safety and sprinkler systems, building systems maintenance and repair technicians, engineers, mechanics, smelters and other service providers who provide services that are necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation and daily essential operation of residences and commercial buildings;
- educational institutions — including public and private K-12 schools, and public post-secondary institutions — for purposes of facilitating remote learning or performing essential functions, including services that are needed to ensure the safety, security, welfare, integrity and health of the community, property and research and certain operational and contractual activities, if operating under rules for physical distancing or other recommendations from the PHO;
- in relation to research universities, services including COVID-19-related research, residential housing and food services for students on campus, building operations and risk management, animal care services, health services for students, IT including data security and infrastructure, finance/payroll/administration/HR/communications and child care for essential university staff;
- laundromats, dry cleaners and laundry service providers;
- restaurants and other facilities that prepare and serve food, if operating under rules for social and physical distancing or other recommendations from the PHO;
- towing services and other vehicle repair/maintenance operations;
- schools and other entities that provide free food services to students or members of the public, if operating under rules for physical distancing or other recommendations from the PHO;
- construction work, in accordance with PHO direction, construction firms, skilled trades and professionals, and construction and light industrial machinery and equipment rental;
- businesses that ensure global continuity of supply of primary and value-added forestry/silviculture products (e.g., lumber, pulp, paper, wood fuel, etc.) including soft-pulp products, such as protective masks, gowns, drapes, screens and other hospital supplies, as well as household paper products;
- postal services, including both public and private mailing, shipping, logistics, courier, delivery services and post office boxes;
- research services supporting essential sectors, including medical/clinical research and industrial research;
- all government (local, regional, provincial) functions or services;
- businesses and non-profits that provide support services to citizens and businesses on behalf of government – these include but are not limited to: income assistance and disability assistance, pensions, residential tenancy, BC Services Card, drivers' licensing, Affordable Child Care Benefit,

- Medical Services Plan, forest-worker support programs, notary, commissioner, affidavits, pesticide exams, invigilation for essential trades, 1 888 COVID19, verify by video, and helpdesk for BCeID;
- weather forecasters;
 - businesses that ensure global continuity of supply of mining materials and products (e.g., metals such as copper, nickel and gold) and that support supply chains including
 - mining operations, production and processing;
 - mineral exploration and development; and
 - mining supply and services that support supply chains in the mining industry including maintenance of operations, health and safety;
 - workers at operations centres necessary to maintain other essential functions;
 - professional services, including lawyers and paralegals, engineers, accountants, translators;
 - land registration services and real estate agent services;
 - building code enforcement, inspection of buildings, building sites and building systems by building officials and registered professionals (architects and engineers);
 - public washrooms and hygiene facilities (toilets, handwash stations, showers) for unsheltered persons; and
 - parks and green space for public health and sheltering (for people experiencing homelessness).