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## UPDATE

For Immediate Release  
2021LBR0025-001178  
June 17, 2021

Ministry of Labour

### **Employer reimbursement program launches for COVID-19 paid sick leave**

VICTORIA – Starting Thursday, June 17, 2021, employers can apply for reimbursement of wages paid to workers who have taken sick leave related to COVID-19.

The temporary reimbursement program is retroactive to May 20, when legislation was passed, to ensure sick workers can stay home for up to three days without losing wages, while supporting businesses during the pandemic.

The amendments to the Employment Standards Act (ESA) require employers to pay sick workers their regular wages. Employers can then apply for reimbursement up to \$200 per day, to a maximum of three days per worker. Any employer whose workers are covered under the ESA but does not currently provide paid sick leave benefits to its employees will be eligible.

The reimbursement program is available to employers where workers need to stay home because they:

- have been diagnosed with COVID-19;
- are waiting for COVID-19 test results;
- need to self-isolate or self-monitor in accordance with a public health order or guideline; and/or
- have been directed to stay home by their employer due to exposure risks.

WorkSafeBC is administering the program with funding from government. WorkSafeBC's IT systems and employer information allowed it to set up a new process to deliver the reimbursement program on behalf of government, which will be available to employers until Dec. 31, 2021. The program is not part of the workers' compensation system and will not affect WorkSafeBC's employer premiums or its accident fund. Costs of administering the program will also be covered by government.

To apply for reimbursement, employers must be registered for WorkSafeBC compensation coverage and signed up for WorkSafeBC's online services. Employers will be required to complete a short online form that collects information about their employees' COVID-19 related sick leave. Once submitted, processing of the application and payment by electronic transfer can take up to 10 business days.

Government has also committed to establishing a permanent paid sick leave program, beginning Jan. 1, 2022. A comprehensive consultation with stakeholders and the public will be announced shortly.

#### **Quick Facts:**

- An estimated 50% of B.C. employees do not have access to paid sick leave.
- This means upwards of one million workers in B.C. will benefit from entitlement to the new paid sick leave requirement.
- Many vulnerable and low-wage workers – who are often women, newcomers or migrant workers – lack benefits, so the ability to take paid leave will be especially beneficial to them.

**Learn More:**

For information on B.C.'s paid COVID-19 related sick leave, or to apply for the reimbursement, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/info/paid-sick-leave>

For more information on B.C.'s employment standards, visit:  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards>

For more information on federal Employment Insurance sickness benefits, visit:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-sickness.html>

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