



## PROVINCIAL COURT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

[The March 12, 2020 Update must be read in conjunction with later Updates replacing it.](#)

### March 12, 2020 - COVID 19 Message

The Provincial Court of BC has contingency planning in place to respond to a variety of critical situations. In recent weeks we have been adapting those plans to meet the concerns and challenges raised by the spread of the Novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Keeping the public informed is an important part of our planning. We will post information about the Court's response to COVID-19 on this web page and on our Twitter account @BCProvCourt.

We have been closely monitoring information and guidance from the BC Centre for Disease Control and updates from the provincial and federal governments. Because the situation regarding COVID-19 is fluid, we will continue monitoring and assessing information as it becomes available. Should any changes in court operations be necessary, we will post the details as soon as possible.

We are committed to taking the steps necessary to safeguard the health of everyone in our courtrooms and court facilities while ensuring access to justice, upholding the rule of law, and continuing court operations as effectively and efficiently as possible.

### March 12, 2020 - COVID 19 Update

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization's Director General made an assessment that COVID 19 can be characterized as a pandemic – a technical word used to describe how widespread a disease is. While we recognize that Health Canada is currently indicating the public health risk is low, we will monitor the situation closely so we are ready to respond promptly in case that changes.

To date, our response has included ongoing communication with our employees, judges and justices to provide information about how to reduce transmission and what to do if symptoms develop. We have also connected with others in the justice sector to discuss shared issues and enable us to respond promptly and effectively, should there be an increase in COVID-19 infection rates in BC.

We are working with the BC Supreme Court and the Ministry of Attorney General (responsible for courthouse and court registry operation) to plan potential responses that may require coordination. Our contingency planning includes preparing for a variety of challenges that could arise should the Court have to alter its normal operation – including those involving bail hearings; urgent applications; ongoing and scheduled trials; courthouse closures, and more.

Currently the Provincial Court is fully open and serving the public.

Should we reach a point where a reduction of court operations or other measures are necessary, the Court will post information on its website [www.provincialcourt.bc.ca](http://www.provincialcourt.bc.ca) and Twitter account [@BCProvCourt](https://twitter.com/BCProvCourt) as soon as possible.

## **Attending court**

Most court proceedings are open to the public, but if you have symptoms or have been in contact with someone who has symptoms please follow the BC Centre for Disease Control's advice and do not come to court to watch. Symptoms listed by the BC Centre for Disease Control are cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat and difficulty breathing.

Lawyers, parties and witnesses who are ill, in self-isolation recommended by a health professional, or in quarantine should take steps to notify other parties and the Court as soon as possible.

Parties with lawyers and witnesses whose testimony has been arranged by a lawyer should contact the lawyer. For a criminal proceeding people without lawyers should contact the Crown prosecutor for their case. People without lawyers for other types of proceedings should contact the court registry where their court appearance is scheduled. Find court registry contact information on the website of the provincial Ministry of Attorney General:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/courthouseservices/courthouse-locations>.

**If you fail to attend court without taking these steps an order can be made in your absence.**

In some cases, a judge may permit a lawyer or party who is unable to attend in person to make their court appearance by telephone. Telephone the Court Registry to ask about applying for a telephone appearance.

The Court encourages counsel to avoid last-minute adjournment requests by:

- contacting their clients and any witnesses scheduled to testify to confirm their attendance; and
- taking the necessary steps to advise other parties and the Court of any adjournment applications as soon as possible.