
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

2025LBR0016-000336

April 15, 2025

Ministry of Labour

Ministry of Health

Sick notes restriction will leave more time for patient care

VICTORIA – Changes to the Employment Standards Act will leave health-care providers with more time to spend with patients by eliminating the need for workers to get sick notes for short-term absences from work.

Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Labour, has introduced Bill 11, amending the Employment Standards Act to help ease the administrative burden on B.C.'s health-care practitioners by clarifying when it is appropriate for employers to request a sick note from workers.

“When you’re sick, the last thing you should have to do is go to your doctor or a medical clinic in order to get a piece of paper saying you’re sick,” Whiteside said. “Not only is that difficult for a sick person to do, but it doesn’t help you get better any faster or prevent the spread of illness.”

Currently, the act allows employers to request “reasonably sufficient proof” that an employee is sick. The changes to the act will clarify employers can’t request, and employees are not required to provide, a sick note written by a physician, nurse practitioner or registered nurse as evidence that the employee’s short-term absence from work was related to illness or injury.

“We’ve heard clearly from doctors around the province that unnecessary paperwork robs them of valuable time to see their patients,” said Josie Osborne, Minister of Health. “Eliminating sick notes for short-term absences is just one of the actions we are taking to cut administrative burden, make our system more efficient, and free up health professionals to focus on what they do best – providing care to British Columbians.”

Regulations will be established following engagement with stakeholders. Regulations will set out how many days is considered a short-term absence, and how often an employee may be absent before their employer can request a formal sick note. While the initial thrust of the regulations will deal with notes from doctors and nurse practitioners, the regulations may also consider notes from other health professionals.

The regulation will be implemented prior to respiratory illness season in fall 2025.

In addition to addressing unnecessary sick notes, the regulation update includes replacing fax and paper-based processes with digital systems, streamlining referral processes, consolidating and standardizing forms, and improving information-sharing between providers. As a result of a partnership effort with Doctors of BC and Health Quality BC, changes are being implemented related to the scheduling of medical imaging appointments, which are anticipated to save more than 180,000 physician hours per year.

Quotes:

Dr. Tracy Tresoor, physician, Ross Bay Health Clinic –

“Providing sick notes are one of many administrative burdens that family physicians face. More importantly, they highlight a disparity in access for people who do not have a primary care provider. I will welcome this small but meaningful change and hope that employers support their workers as well.”

Jane Narayan, family nurse practitioner, Axis Primary Care Clinic –

“I strongly support the decision to remove the requirement for employer-mandated sick notes for short-term and episodic illnesses. Too often, clinical appointments are booked solely for the purpose of obtaining a sick note. Removing this requirement will reduce unnecessary strain on our health-care system and allow clinicians to focus on delivering timely, meaningful care that genuinely supports our patient’s health and well-being.”

Quick Facts:

- The Canadian Medical Association estimates in 2024, B.C. doctors wrote approximately 1.6 million sick notes.
- Last year, the Canadian Medical Association and Doctors of BC called for the elimination of sick note requirements for employees taking a short-term absence from work due to illness or injury.
- Advocates estimate physicians across Canada spend between 10 and 19 hours each week on paperwork, including sick notes.

Contacts:

Ministry of Labour
Media Relations
250 213-7049

Ministry of Health
Media Relations
250 952-1887

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: news.gov.bc.ca/connect