

Communicating risk information to prevent violence-related injuries to workers

This information sheet discusses how sharing violence risk information can help ensure workers' safety in education, health care, and social services settings.

Employer responsibilities

As an employer, you have a responsibility to identify and mitigate risks to workers, including their risk of violence-related injuries.

Section 4.30 of the OHS Regulation requires employers to inform workers who may be exposed to the risk of violence about the nature and extent of the risk. This includes providing information about the risk of violence from persons who have a history of violent behaviour and whom workers are likely to encounter in the course of their work.

Section 4.27 of the OHS Regulation defines violence as “the attempted or actual exercise by a person, other than a worker, of any physical force so as to cause injury to a worker, and includes any threatening statement or behaviour which gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that the worker is at risk of injury.” These behaviours do not need to have the intent to cause harm to be considered violence, and not every individual who acts violently has the capacity to understand the potential outcomes of their behaviour.

Who is potentially at risk?

Any education, health care, or social services worker who comes into contact with students, patients, clients, residents, program participants, visitors, or other individuals can potentially be at risk of injury from violent behaviour. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Teachers, education assistants, and administrators
- Nursing-related occupations, health care assistants, physicians, and allied health occupations
- Custodial, housekeeping, and food services staff
- Facilities staff, contractors, and casual workers

Disclosure requirements

To help determine whether you need to communicate a person's information related to violent behaviour, ask yourself: Is disclosing this information necessary to protect workers from the risk of violence?

If the answer to this question is “yes,” then disclosure is required, and employers must have processes in place to ensure that this information is communicated to workers.

Communicating with other employers or work locations

Communicating the risk of violence to workers is important when an individual is transferred between departments, services, or locations. This applies to both temporary and permanent transfers.

What and how to communicate

Communicating information about an individual (student, patient, client, resident, program participant, visitor, or other) can help reduce the risk to workers. Types of information to communicate include:

- Relevant history of violent behaviours
- Cognitive or sensory impairment
- Specific triggers
- Early signs of escalating behaviour

The best method of communication will depend on the nature of the workplace and the work. Whatever method is used, ensure that the information:

- Is available to all affected workers, and workers understand when and how to access the information
- Can be updated easily when needed
- Is recorded for reference when required (e.g., for an incident investigation, to show due diligence, when requested by a WorkSafeBC officer)

Examples

The following examples illustrate the types of communication that can take place to help reduce workers' exposure to the risk of violence. Consider what communication processes your workplace uses to ensure all affected workers have the information they need to manage their exposure to the risk of violence in the workplace.

Share information about new clients

Two support workers were on a community outing with a group of individuals, including one individual who was new to the program. During the intake assessment for the new individual, it was identified that the individual had a history of striking out at and hitting others when told not to do something. Prior to the new individual entering the program, the risk of violence and strategies to reduce the risk to workers had been communicated verbally to all workers who might encounter the individual. In addition, this information was documented in the new individual's person-centred plan. Before the outing, both support workers had reviewed the individual's person-centred plan and had discussed how they would safely manage the new individual's behaviour if the person needed to be redirected from an undesirable action during the outing.

Keep all affected workers informed

A housekeeper working a casual shift in a long-term care home saw that there was a purple-dot sticker on a resident's door. During the worker's orientation to the home, she had been told that these stickers were used to indicate residents for whom special procedures were in place to reduce the risk of violence-related injuries. The housekeeper followed the instruction she had been provided, which was to check with a nurse before accessing the resident's room.

Communicate changes

A patient in a psychiatric unit was experiencing an increased level of agitation. This escalated to demonstrating aggressive and threatening behaviour toward others. The nurse providing care to this patient found that the prevention and de-escalation approaches in the care plan were not as effective as they had previously been. The nurse reported this

to his supervisor, who initiated a review of the care plan with the planning team and implemented two-person care in the interim. Information about the patient's behaviour, the care plan review, and interim controls was communicated to the incoming workers during the shift change meeting.

Specific triggers communicated

An education assistant new to the school was informed by their supervisor that a student might react in an aggressive manner if approached from outside of their line of sight. The supervisor reviewed the safety plan developed for this student with the education assistant. The education assistant was able to use this information to interact safely with the student by always approaching the student from the front when engaging with them.

Share information between work locations

An individual was transferred to a new group home. Prior to the move, the employer at the new group home carried out an assessment and made inquiries about the individual's history in relation to any risks of violence associated with them. The employer discovered the individual's history of violence, known triggers of violent behaviour, and strategies to avoid these triggers, and then communicated

appropriate information and mitigation strategies to workers who might be exposed to the risk of violence. These steps assisted in determining whether the type of care offered by the home could meet the individual's needs, and they supported workers in the new home to carry out their work safely. Workers and the individual's family reported their appreciation for the smooth transition the individual experienced.

For more information

- Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, [sections 4.27 to 4.31](#) — Violence in the Workplace
- [Violence](#) (webpage)

If you have questions, you can call the **WorkSafeBC Prevention Information Line: 604.276.3100**, or toll-free **1.888.621.7233**.

For guidance on protecting a person's privacy, consult your organization's privacy officer or other privacy resources, and any relevant professional codes of conduct. The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia has [guidance documents](#) that can help employers establish policies that are compliant with provincial privacy laws.