

Joleen Kaminski

From: CLRInfo
Sent: December 22, 2020 2:26 PM
To: Ken McCormack
Cc: Paul Strangway; Joleen Kaminski
Subject: COVID 19 Update - December 22

CLR Members,

Provincial Update

The number of reported cases of COVID in BC continue to be quite alarming even though the government is claiming that the restrictions put in place seem to be working to slow the spread of the virus. On Monday, B.C. health officials announced 1,667 new cases of COVID-19 and 41 new deaths over a three-day period. This represent a 23% decrease (from 2,146 new cases) which were recorded the previous weekend. Hospitalizations are down slightly, and active cases have shrunk for the first time since the second wave began, according to provincial statistics. As of Monday, 341 people are in hospital, with 80 patients in critical care. The Provincial Health Officer (PHO) said that while B.C.'s curve is currently "levelling," it's at too high a plateau, with significant growth of new cases in the Interior and the north of B.C.

Dr. Henry and Health Minister Adrian Dix have urged British Columbians to *hold the line against the virus and adhere to provincial health guidelines over the holiday season.* Current provincial health orders in B.C., which include *voluntary restrictions on non-essential travel and a mandatory ban on social gatherings, are set to expire on Jan. 8.*

On Friday, Canada halted flights from the UK in response to a new, potentially more contagious strain of the virus. Dr. Henry said no new cases with the mutation have been discovered in B.C. or any other part of Canada, but the UK situation has given Canada (and BC) time to put in appropriate protective measures. Health authorities are saying that so far, the mutated virus does not seem to increase severity of the illness, however it can transmit more easily. Authorities are saying that a mutation of the virus was not unexpected.

Federal Updates

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)

The federal government has concluded the necessary regulatory changes to raise the maximum wage subsidy rate to 75% for the Dec. 20, 2020 to Mar. 13, 2021 period of the CEWS program. In addition, employers can now access the maximum subsidy rate based on a single month's revenue decline instead of having to demonstrate three months' decline, according to the government. The rate for furloughed workers will also go up to \$595 for the announced period.

In November, the government gave Bill C-9 royal assent, ensuring that the CEWS will continue until June 2021, with rates of up to 65% of eligible wages until Dec. 19, 2020. The government first introduced the legislation earlier that month.

The CEWS aims to protect jobs, encourage employers to quickly rehire workers who were previously laid off because of the COVID-19 pandemic and help the Canadian economy recover from this crisis. Since its implementation in March 2020, it has helped more than 3.7 million Canadians. Since its launch, more than four million Canadian employees have had their jobs supported through the CEWS with more than \$54 billion paid out in wage subsidies as of Dec. 13, 2020, according to the government.

Information on the CEWS and how to apply can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/subsidy/emergency-wage-subsidy.html>

Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) - Repayments

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Trudeau said Canadians should not be worried about repayments of the CERB over Christmas. Recently, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) sent out “educational” letters to nearly 500,000 CERB recipients asking for more information to determine if they met the income eligibility requirement for the program. The CRA’s letter also encouraged those found to be ineligible to repay the CERB payments by the end of the year to avoid any 2021 tax issues (i.e.: If people repay the CERB, the CRA won’t issue a T4A for that payment). To ensure that the government does not issue slips improperly, recipients have been told they need to repay their CERB before Dec. 31, 2020.

Facing pressure from opposition parties, the government is now telling Canadians not to let that letter cause them stress saying that CERB recipients do not need to concern themselves with the deadline until Jan. 1, 2021. The Prime Minister has also not denied the possibility of waiving repayments altogether for those who applied for the benefit by mistake.

Information on the CERB can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/cerb-application.html>

Please stay safe and well this Holiday Season.

As this will be the last COVID update communique from CLR this year, despite the challenges that this year has brought, the CLR Board of Directors and our staff wish you and your families a safe and very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Sincerely,

Ken McCormack | President & CEO

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