British Columbia To Eliminate Sick Notes For Short-Term Absences: What Employers Need To Know



Effective this fall, Bill 11 will amend the *Employment Standards Act* to remove the requirement for employees to provide a doctor's note for short-term health-related absences.

Employers should be aware of the following key points:

- The legislation eliminates the need for a doctor's note for "short-term" absences;
- The term "short-term absence" is not currently defined in the legislation, leaving employers to interpret what qualifies as short-term in practice;
- The change is intended to ease pressure on BC's healthcare system and reduce unnecessary administrative costs for both doctors and employers.

The absence of a statutory definition for "short-term" raises important considerations. Employers may reasonably ask: Does this apply to absences of one day? Three? Five? Without further guidance, the lack of clarity may impact sick leave policies, attendance management practices, and approaches to handling potential misuse.

Further, the removal of automatic medical verification may challenge employers in workplaces where trust and communication are already strained. In cases where an employee's absence may trigger a duty to accommodate, employers may need to consider alternative means of understanding the employee's functional restrictions.

In the absence of further interpretative guidance, employers may consider taking the following steps:

- Update Sick Leave Policies: Consider removing blanket doctor-note requirements for brief absences and include language referring to "reasonably sufficient proof" instead;
- Train Supervisors: Ensure operational managers understand when they may or may not request medical information once the supporting regulations are released;
- Reinforce Accommodation Procedures: Confirm that return-to-work and disability accommodation processes are distinct from general sick-leave tracking to ensure continued access to medical information where appropriate.

Originally published 2025 Oct 1

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

Author: Gale Kim

Mackoff Mohamed Barristers & Solicitors