

*March 13, 2020*

## **BC Courts' Response to COVID-19**

In response to the rapidly evolving situation with COVID-19, the Court of Appeal for British Columbia, the Supreme Court of British Columbia and the Provincial Court of British Columbia ("Courts") have developed a coordinated approach to manage impacts of the virus on the operations of the Courts. The goals of the Plan are to:

- maintain and preserve the rule of law;
- protect the health and well-being of judiciary, judicial staff, courthouse staff, sheriffs, lawyers, litigants, witnesses, jury members and the public; and
- facilitate efficient and effective decision-making processes for Courts across the province.

The Courts' Plan has four Alert Levels:

- **Alert Level 1** - Education and virus transmission prevention. Courthouses are open to the public.
- **Alert Level 2** - Reduced operations due to moderate judiciary, judicial staff, courthouse staff and sheriff absences, and to protect public health and to reduce and slow the transmission of the virus. Courthouses are open to the public.
- **Alert Level 3** - Significantly reduced operations due to significant judiciary, judicial staff, courthouse staff and sheriff absences, and to protect public health and reduce and slow the transmission of the virus. Public access to courthouses may be reduced.
- **Alert Level 4** - Courthouse operations limited to essential services. Courthouse closed to the public.

Regardless of Alert Level, members of the public who are ill should refrain from visiting the Courts in order to protect the health of others and to prevent the spread of illness, including COVID-19.

The Chief Justices and the Chief Judge, in consultation with the Chief Administrator of Court Services and Assistant Deputy Minister, Court Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General have activated the Plan and it is currently set at **Alert Level 2**. In implementing Alert Level 2, the Courts have been doing the following:

- Preparing information about modifications to proceedings, hearings or appearances including instructions for lawyers, litigants, witnesses and jury members about attending at courthouses.
- Making arrangements for the increased use of telephone and video appearances where appropriate and available rather than in-person court appearances.
- Considering arrangements for court proceedings to be conducted from different court locations where resources are available.

- Providing information to judiciary, judicial staff, courthouse staff and sheriffs about actions they can take to limit the transmission of the virus.

The Courts are working closely with the Ministry of Attorney General, the Public Service Agency and the BC Centre for Disease Control to provide a coordinated response to COVID-19 and to protect everyone's health.