

# COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Parks and Green Spaces

## COVID-19: Public Health Guidance for Parks and Green Spaces in Step 3

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The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly. This guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website (<https://www.swpublichealth.ca/>) regularly for updates and announcements. This guidance is to support individuals to visit parks and green spaces safely and includes mandated restrictions and capacity limits in place in Step 3 of Ontario's [Roadmap to Reopen](#).

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### Key Points

- Outdoor gatherings with up to 100 people are permitted in Step 3, as long as physical distancing is maintained.
- Outdoor playgrounds and play structures are permitted to be open.
- Clean and disinfect public washrooms as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary environment, with extra cleaning/disinfection prior to and following larger gatherings.
- Make hand sanitizer stations available if possible, particularly during public gatherings (i.e. movies, weddings).

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### Preamble

Research shows the availability of parks and green spaces contributes to community health by providing environments that encourage and facilitate both physical health and mental wellbeing. [Access to affordable recreation](#) has been identified as one of many priorities to improve the quality of life for everyone in Elgin-St. Thomas and Oxford County (see the full report on access to recreation in the [community reports](#) section). Today, the need for affordable recreation and access to green space has increased by the social, economic and mental health challenges many citizens have experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By providing an opportunity for recreation and physical activity, municipalities can enable people of all ages to remain resilient, healthy and improve their quality of life during a challenging and unprecedented time. It is important to recognize the benefits of parks and green spaces while mitigating

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the risks of transmitting COVID-19 to ensure public health and safety. The following recommendations are provided to keep the community safe and healthy while preventing community transmission of COVID-19 within the Southwestern Public Health region.

## Current Restrictions for Parks and Green Spaces

Please be aware of provincial emergency orders and restrictions that remain in effect as part of the COVID-19 response. Orders affecting parks and green spaces include:

### Gathering Limits

Gatherings have the potential to result in the spread of COVID-19 if they are not planned and managed carefully. The gathering limits prescribed in Ontario's [Roadmap to Reopen](#) for unmonitored and private social gatherings are:

- Step 3: up to 100 people at an outdoor gathering, and up to 25 people at an indoor gathering

These limits apply to all unmonitored and private social gatherings such as functions, parties, dinners, gatherings, BBQs and wedding receptions held in private residences, backyards, parks and other recreational areas. As was the case with the previous limits, indoor and outdoor gatherings cannot be combined. For example, gatherings of 125 people in total (100 outdoors and 25 indoors) are not permitted in step 3. All gatherings are subject to requirements for physical distancing of two meters for all people who are not from the same household.

### Playgrounds

Outdoor playgrounds and play structures are currently permitted to open. Please see our [Guidance for Community Use of Playgrounds](#).

### Face Coverings

It is recommended you wear a face covering or mask while outdoors whenever face-to-face with someone outside of your household, especially if you are within two metres.

### Examples of Gatherings

- Weddings:
  - In Step 3, religious services, rites or ceremonies (including wedding services and funeral services) held outdoors or indoors are limited to capacity that permits physical distancing of 2 meters. This does NOT apply to social gatherings associated with these services, such as receptions.

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- In Step 3, social gatherings associated with a wedding, such as receptions, are limited to 100 people outdoors, or 25 people indoors.
- All attendees must comply with physical distancing by remaining at least two metres apart from other attendees unless they are members of the same household.
- Movies in the Park:
  - In Step 3, outdoor cinemas are permitted to open with capacity limited to 75% of the usual capacity, or 5,000 persons, whichever is less. The 75% capacity is determined by taking the total square metres of area accessible by the public, dividing that number by 1.33, and rounding the result down to the nearest whole number.
  - All attendees must comply with physical distancing by remaining at least two metres apart from other attendees unless they are members of the same household.
  - Encourage individuals to bring an outdoor blanket or chairs to use while watching the movie and remain seated with their household members during the movie.
- Yoga in the Park:
  - In Step 3, outdoor gatherings and organized public events and outdoor fitness classes are limited to 100 people.
  - All attendees must comply with physical distancing by remaining at least two meters apart from other attendees unless they are members of the same household.
  - Participants should be responsible for bringing their own equipment (such as a yoga mat, towel, water bottle, sunscreen, etc.) and not share their items with others.

## Cleaning and Disinfection of Public Washrooms

Please follow our guidelines for the [cleaning and disinfection of public washrooms](#). Any public washroom open and available to gathering attendees are to be cleaned and disinfected “as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary environment.” Southwestern Public Health recommends cleaning and disinfecting prior to and following the service, ceremony, event or gathering as the frequency of use increases with such gatherings.

Remember to follow the [public health principles for public spaces](#) as they pertain to parks and green spaces. This includes requirements for physical distancing and hand hygiene. Where physical distancing of two meters is not possible or a significant challenge, the use of [non-medical masks or face coverings](#) are recommended.

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## Hand Hygiene

Consider posting information about proper [hand hygiene](#) and ensure that in addition to cleaning and disinfecting public washrooms, [hand sanitizer](#) stations are made available, particularly during public gatherings such as movies in the park. Alternatively, encourage park users to bring their own hand sanitizer if the washroom is unavailable for use, or the hand soap/ sanitizer is depleted.

## Additional Resources

The Public Services Health and Safety Association has issued guidance for [parks and recreation workers](#) and parks and recreation [employers](#).

[COVID-19 and Outdoor Safety](#): Considerations for the use of outdoor recreational spaces. *National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health*, April 17, 2020.

Parks and Recreation: A True Health Solution Infographic. *National Parks and Recreation Association*, July 2017.

[Ontario Regulation 364/20 – Rules for Areas in Step 3](#)