

COVID-19: Guidance for Community Gardens



May 21, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly, and this guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website swpublichealth.ca regularly for updates and additional information. To sign up to receive our newsletter, visit the [partners and professionals page](#) on www.swpublichealth.ca.

On April 25th the Government of Ontario lifted restrictions, allowing community gardens to operate following the guidance of the local Medical Officer of Health. This factsheet provides current guidance from Southwestern Public Health under the advice of Dr. Joyce Lock, Medical Officer of Health.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY GARDENS:

Community gardens play an important role in our food system by providing spaces for residents to grow their own food and increasing access to healthy foods. Community gardens also promote a sense of community belonging and an opportunity for residents to be physically active, which can contribute to good mental health and wellbeing.

Please note: Community gardens are not a recreational space or place for social gatherings. Their sole purpose is for essential food production.

FOR GARDEN COORDINATORS AND GARDEN MANAGERS:

Before opening community gardens, garden coordinators and garden managers must:

- Provide rules to all community garden members and have them clearly posted at the garden, which includes signs that:
 - o Restrict access to registered members, staff and volunteers. Non-members and visitors should not be permitted to enter. Children should only be brought to the garden on an as needed basis and must follow physical distancing and hand hygiene recommendations.

- o List the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, not to visit if ill/under isolation, and where to seek assistance if they have symptoms: covid19checkup.ca, SWPH Call Centre 1-800-922-0096 ext. 9 or Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000.
- o Limit the use of the garden to only plant, maintain, and harvest food; and prohibit use for events such as festivals, children's events, and other programming, training or group build activities.
- o Discourage sharing of food or personal items.
- o Outline [physical distancing](#) requirements.
- o Instruct garden users and plot owners to wash their hands before entering and after leaving the garden site.
- Remove or tape off picnic tables and other structures meant for communal seating and gatherings.
- Provide hand sanitizer or hand washing station(s) at garden if possible. Sanitizer should be at least 70% alcohol and should only be used if hands are not visibly soiled and/or after washing hands with soap and water.
- Set up a sanitizing schedule for equipment and tools using [approved disinfectant](#) and cleaners that are effective for COVID-19:
 - o Tools/equipment that need to be cleaned and disinfected include hose, hose tap, door/gate handles, etc. and must be cleaned at minimum before opening and after closing.
- Make it clear that gardeners should only use their own tools/gardening gloves. If it is not possible for gardeners to use their own tools and shared tools need to be made available, each gardener must clean and sanitize the tool before and after use.
- Develop and communicate (to registered members, staff, and volunteers) COVID-19 policies/protocols that are specific to the community garden.
- Update a list of current registered members, staff, and volunteers and track those who have agreed to participate under the COVID-19 policies and protocols.
- Revoke access of any member not following the rules set out for garden safety.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- If the garden has gate access, consider leaving the gate open during hours of operation so individuals do not have to handle or touch the gate to enter.
- Consider using a sign-in/sign-out sheet to track who is in the garden each day.

PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR USE OF COMMUNITY GARDENS DURING COVID-19:

- Garden users and plot owners should ensure that they are familiar with all rules and guidelines prior to accessing the garden.
- Individuals should not attend the garden if they are sick or have been directed to isolate. If sick, plot owners should arrange to have someone tend their plot for them until they are feeling better and/or are able to come out of isolation, whichever is longer.
- Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling common tools such as hoses or gates and before and after gardening.
- Remember gloves are not a substitute for washing hands.
- Hand sanitizer can only be used when hands are not visibly soiled.
- At all times maintain physical distancing of 2 metres between yourself and other gardeners.
- Avoid touching surfaces such as gates and doorknobs where possible.
- Bring your own garden tools. If you are using shared tools, ensure to sanitize the handles of the shared tools after use.
- Do not bring pets to the garden with you.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth, eyes, and face.
- Place all trash in proper garbage receptacle or take garbage with you to dispose of at home
- Wash all produce before consumption according to safe food handling requirements.
- Remember to wear sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat to protect your skin from the sun.



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