

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Events

Guidance for Events during COVID-19

September 24, 2020
Version 3.0

This guidance reflects the current need for protection from COVID-19 in Ontario. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, and this guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website www.swpublichealth.ca regularly for updates and additional information.

Key Points

- Ensure gathering limits are adhered to. Contact by-law enforcement at your municipality if you have questions regarding gathering limits.).
 - Promote physical distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette to attendees through social media, announcements, posters etc.
 - Adhere to **mandatory face covering** requirements, where applicable.
 - Ensure cleaning and disinfection of all frequently touched surfaces at least twice per day, and more often as needed.
 - If providing food, ensure that food is being served in accordance with the Food Premises Regulation and current emergency measures.
 - Have protocols in place if individuals become ill at the event. Notify Southwestern Public Health (SWPH) for further direction.
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General Principles

- The *more people* an individual interacts with at a gathering and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the potential of becoming infected with COVID-19 and COVID-19 spreading.
- The **higher the level of community transmission** in the area where the gathering is being held, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spreading during a gathering.

Different types of events have **different levels of risk**:

Lower risk: Virtual-only activities, events, and gatherings. In-person gatherings with individuals from your social circle.

Moderate risk: Medium-sized in-person gatherings adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 2m apart and with attendees from outside the local area.

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Higher risk: Large in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 2m apart, and attendees from outside the local area.

COVID 19 Transmission

COVID-19 is primarily spread by respiratory droplets released when people talk, cough, or sneeze. Staying home when sick and practicing physical distancing, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene are essential measures that an individual can take to help stop the spread. Businesses should conduct enhanced environmental cleaning/disinfection and establish policies to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance document provides event planners and individuals with recommendations to help lower the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread during gatherings and events.

Stage 3 of Re-Opening

The Ontario Government is continuing its gradual, staged approach to reopening. Necessary restrictions are in place to contain the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak. See [Stage 3 Framework](#) for more information.

The following high-risk places and activities are not yet safe to open, due to the likelihood of large crowds congregating, difficulties with physical distancing or challenges maintaining the proper cleaning and sanitation required to prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- Amusement parks and water parks
- Buffet-style food services
- Dancing at restaurants and bars, other than by performers hired by the establishment following specific requirements
- Overnight stays at camps for children
- Private karaoke rooms
- Prolonged or deliberate contact while playing sports
- Saunas, steam rooms, bathhouses and oxygen bars
- Table games at casinos and gaming establishments.

Gathering Size Restrictions

- Gatherings held at a place operated by a business or organization that will be monitored by staff throughout the entire duration of the gathering: Limited to 50 attendees for indoor gatherings or 100 attendees for outdoor gatherings. This applies to:
 - An organized public event.
 - A social gathering.

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- A **social gathering** associated with a wedding, a funeral or a religious service, rite or ceremony.

Note that indoor and outdoor events and gatherings cannot be merged. Gatherings of 150 (100 outdoors and 50 indoors) are not permitted.

Unmonitored and private social gatherings include functions, parties, dinners, gatherings, BBQs or wedding receptions held in private residences, backyards, parks and other recreational areas:

- Limited to 10 attendees for indoor gatherings or 25 attendees for outdoor gatherings.
- **Note that indoor and outdoor events and gatherings cannot be merged rings of 35 (25 outdoors and 10 indoors) are not permitted.**

Weddings, Funerals, and Other Religious Services:

- Limited to 30% of the capacity of the room holding a gathering. This applies to:
 - Wedding **services**
 - Funeral **services**
 - Religious **service, rite or ceremony**
- Outdoor services are limited to 100 attendees.

Exceptions to above gathering limits:

- Gathering limits noted above do not apply to events held at premises subject to Schedule 1 or 2 of the [Rules for Areas in Stage 3](#). The premises must ensure that the event is held in accordance with that capacity limit noted in Schedule 1 or 2 (E.g. restaurants and bars).

All persons attending an event or social gathering must comply with public health guidance on physical distancing and mandatory face coverings as applicable.

Contact your local bylaw office for more information on gathering sizes and restrictions.

Promote Healthy Behaviours

Implement strategies to encourage behaviours that reduce the spread of COVID-19 among staff and attendees.

Stay Home When Ill

- Inform staff and attendees to stay home when ill. Provide information before the event (e.g. social media messages, email, flyers).
- Consider active screening for staff and attendees at the entrance(s).
 - Ask if staff/attendees:
 - Have symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing
 - Have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days

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- Have been instructed by public health to self-isolate due to travel or contact history
- Any staff/attendees who answers “yes” to any of these conditions must be sent home and advised to follow public health guidance.

Physical Distancing

- Encourage attendees to practice physical distancing, at least 2m apart, unless part of the same household or social circle.
- Limit the number of attendees in the venue to permit physical distancing.
 - Adhere to gathering limits as directed by the province.
- Remind attendees to physically distance with verbal reminders, visual cues, posters, announcements, etc.

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

- Require frequent employee **handwashing** (e.g., before, during, and after taking tickets, after handling money, and after touching garbage).
- If soap and water are not readily available and hands are not visibly soiled, employees and attendees can use a **hand sanitizer** that contains 60% to 90% alcohol.
- Staff and attendees should **cover the mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing**.
- Encourage staff and attendees to wash hands often.
- Discourage exchanging handshakes, fist bumps, high-fives and other physical interactions at events.

Face Coverings and Masks

- Face coverings or masks must be worn in all public spaces and any employee spaces when physical distancing is not possible.
 - Face coverings refer to non-medical masks, such as cloth masks. Non-medical masks are used to protect others from exposure to the wearer’s respiratory aerosols/droplets.
 - Masks refer to medical masks (surgical, medical procedure face masks and respirators like N95 masks). These masks should be used only as necessary (e.g. if providing direct care to a person who is feeling unwell).
- Provide staff with a supply of face coverings/masks. Consider having a supply of face coverings/masks for attendees. If you do not intend to supply face coverings/masks for attendees, you should advertise so that attendees can plan accordingly.
- Encourage attendees to bring and use their **face coverings** at the event.
 - Some **exemptions** for face covering requirements apply. If someone meets this exemption, they cannot be denied service.
 - If someone does not meet the exemption criteria and does not have a face covering and refuses to wear a face covering, they must be denied entry.
- Provide all staff with information on **proper use, removal, and washing of face coverings**.

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Adequate Supplies

- Ensure adequate supplies are available to support hand hygiene and environmental cleaning and disinfection. Supplies include soap, water, hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol, paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes and no-touch trash cans.
- Ensure to have enough supply to provide face coverings/masks to employees.
- Consider having a supply of face coverings/masks to provide to attendees. If you do not intend to supply attendees, you should advertise so that attendees can plan accordingly.

Signs and Messages

- Post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances, in washrooms) that promote **staying home if ill, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and use of face coverings.**
- Make announcements over the PA system reminding staff and patrons to practice respiratory etiquette, use face coverings where needed, frequently wash/sanitize hands, maintain physical distancing etc.
- Include messages about behaviours that prevent the spread of COVID-19 when communicating with staff, vendors, and attendees (such as videos on the event website and through event social media accounts).
- Consider developing signs and messages in alternative formats (e.g., large print, braille, American Sign Language).

Maintain Healthy Environments

Event planners should consider implementing several strategies to maintain healthy environments.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Develop a schedule for increased, routine cleaning and disinfection. Ensure these cleaning routines are followed by all groups who use your facilities.
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces within the venue at least twice daily or between uses as much as possible—for example, door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains, grab bars, hand railings, and cash registers.
- Only use disinfectants with a Drug Identification Number (DIN).
- Clean and disinfect shared objects between uses—for example, payment terminals, tables, countertops, bars etc.
- Consider closing areas such as drinking fountains that cannot be adequately cleaned and disinfected during an event. If fountains remain open, ensure that the mouthpieces are regularly cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- If **transport vehicles** like buses are used by the event staff, drivers should practice all safety actions and protocols as indicated for other staff—for example, washing hands often, wearing cloth face coverings, and maintaining physical distance from bus riders.

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Washrooms

- Ensure patrons can practice physical distancing (2 metres) when in line and using the public washroom.
- Place floor markers 2 metres (6 foot) apart in busier washrooms.
- Post maximum occupancy signs to ensure physical distancing can be maintained.
- Tape off sinks and urinals that are not spaced 2 meter (6 feet) apart .
- All high-touch areas/surfaces must be cleaned and disinfected at least 2 times per day.
 - This includes door handles, sink taps, toilet handles, stall doors/locks, etc.
- The frequency of cleaning and disinfection may need to be more than 2 times per day, dependent on the amount of use. Please refer to the [Public Health Ontario Guidance Document on Environmental Cleaning](#) for further guidance.
- See [Public Washrooms guidance document](#) for more information.

Modified Layouts

- Limit attendance and seating capacity to allow for [physical distancing](#), or host smaller events in larger rooms.
- Use multiple entrances and exits and discourage crowded waiting areas. Consider a one-way flow of traffic, if feasible.
- Block off rows or sections of seating to space people at least 6 feet apart.
- Eliminate lines or queues if possible, and encourage people to stay at least 6 feet apart by providing [signs](#) or other visual cues such as tape or chalk marks if lines cannot be avoided.
- Offer online attendance options in addition to in-person attendance to help reduce the number of attendees.

Physical Barriers and Guides

- Install physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions, in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least 6 feet apart (e.g. at cash registers)
 - In areas where physical barriers are installed, members of the public are still required to wear a face covering. An employee behind this barrier does not need to wear a face covering unless they cannot physically distance from another employee.
- See recommendations from NCCEH for more information on physical barriers
 - <https://ncceh.ca/content/blog/physical-barriers-covid-19-infection-prevention-and-control-commercial-settings>

Food Service

- Ensure to operate in accordance with all applicable legislative requirements (e.g. Food Premises Regulation).
- Ensure to follow requirements under Emergency Measures Act. See [Restaurant Re-Opening Guidance Document](#) for more information.

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- If providing bar services, please see [Bar Services Guidance Document](#) for more information.
- Bars and restaurants are required to keep client logs for 30 days.
 - The following information must be collected:
 - name and contact information of at least one person in each party
 - date
 - check-in and check out times
 - location of seating
- Upon request, this information must be disclosed to the Medical Officer of Health or a public health inspector for contact tracing. Food must be served to attendees. Food cannot be provided in communal bowls and serving platters (i.e. no buffets, grazing tables, or potlucks where attendees serve their food).
- Create a procedure for collecting dirty dishes.
 - Ensure dishes are cleared promptly by staff and ensure attendees do not handle the dirty dishes of people outside their social circle.
 - Staff should wash their hands after handling dirty dishes.
 - Consider using disposable food service items, including utensils and dishes, which can be immediately discarded.
- All attendees must be seated when eating or drinking.
 - Patrons sitting at the same table must be from the same household or social circle. For events with assigned seating, event organizers should work with individuals to ensure they are seated at tables with persons in their social circles/household.
 - Event organizers must ensure physical distancing of at least two metres between patrons from different tables unless separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier.
 - See NCCEH website for more information on barriers:
<https://ncceh.ca/content/blog/physical-barriers-covid-19-infection-prevention-and-control-commercial-settings>
- Physical distancing of two metres between patrons from different households or social circles also continues to apply to food trucks, food courts, concession stands and tours, including tastings at wineries, breweries and distilleries.

Singing and Music

- Singing or music may be performed by a person or group at the restaurant or bar, with restrictions, including barriers between the performers and patrons and physical distancing. Dancing may only occur by someone working at the establishment with restrictions.
- Karaoke is permitted only outside of private karaoke rooms, which are not yet permitted to open in Stage 3, with restrictions, physical distancing and increased cleaning and disinfecting.

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Dancing

- Under stage 3 requirements, dancing is not permitted at restaurants and bars other than by performers hired by the establishment. Performers must ensure physical distancing of at least 2 metres from all other persons.
 - Patrons are not permitted to dance at bars and restaurants at this time.
- For events held at venues other than restaurants and bars, dancing is not recommended at this time, with certain exceptions:
 - Performers hired by event who ensure physical distancing of at least 2 metres from all other persons.
 - Select individuals, in the same social circle, at an event performing a traditional dance (e.g. a couple having their first dance at a wedding).

Shared Objects

- Discourage people from sharing items that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect.
- Limit any sharing of food, tools, equipment, or supplies by staff members.
- Ensure adequate supplies are available to minimize the sharing of high-touch materials where possible; otherwise, limit the use of supplies and equipment to one group of staff members or attendees at a time, and **clean and disinfect** them between use.

Ventilation

- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase the circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk to staff or attendees (e.g., risk of falling or triggering asthma symptoms).
- If portable ventilation equipment like fans is used, arrange them in a manner to minimize air flowing directly from one person to another. This will reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses.

Water Systems

- To minimize the risk of **Legionnaires' disease** and other diseases associated with water, **take steps** to ensure that all water systems and features (e.g., sink faucets, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown. Drinking fountains should be cleaned and sanitized and flushed.
- Organizers should encourage staff and attendees to bring their own water, as feasible, to minimize touching and use of water fountains.

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Maintaining Healthy Operations

Event organizers and staff may consider implementing several strategies to maintain healthy operations.

Regulatory Awareness

- Be aware of local, provincial and federal requirements related to group gatherings.
- See [Stage 3 Framework](#) for more information.

Designated COVID-19 Point of Contact

- Consider designating an administrator or department to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. All staff and attendees should know who this person or office is and how to contact them.

Communication Systems

- Put systems in place to:
 - Notify staff, attendees, and the public of cancellations and restrictions in place to limit people's exposure to COVID-19 (e.g., limited hours of operation).
 - Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to event staff and participants. Tailor information that is easily understood by various audiences and is available in alternative formats and languages.

Staff Screening

- Before each shift, actively screen staff to identify if they:
 - Have symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing
 - Have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days
 - Have been instructed by public health to self-isolate due to travel or contact history
- Any staff that answers "yes" to any of these conditions should be sent home and advised to follow public health guidance.
- Staff should be reminded to stay home if they are sick.

Limited, Staggered, or Rotated Shifts and Attendance Time

- Consider ways to reduce the number of attendees.
 - Use flexible worksites (e.g., telework) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts) to help establish policies and practices for physical distancing of 6 feet between employees, volunteers, and others.
 - Rotate or stagger shifts and arrival times to limit the number of employees in a venue at the same time.

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- Stagger and limit attendance times to minimize the number of guests at the venue.

Protections for Staff and Attendees who are at Higher Risk of Severe Illness from COVID-19

- Offer options for staff at higher risk for illness (including older adults and people of any age with underlying medical conditions) that limit their exposure risk. For example:
 - Offer telework and modified job responsibilities for staff, such as setting up for the event rather than working at the registration desk.
 - Replace in-person meetings with video- or teleconference calls whenever possible.

Leave (Time Off) Policies

- Implement flexible sick leave policies and practices that are not punitive and enable employees to stay home when they are sick, have been exposed, are caring for an ill individual, or who must stay home with children if schools or child care centers are closed.
- Examine and revise policies for leave, telework, and employee compensation as needed.
- Ensure that any relevant policies are communicated to staff.

Staff Training

- Train staff on all safety protocols and appropriate use of PPE.
- If training needs to be done in person, maintain physical distancing.

Support Coping and Resilience

- Promote employees' ability to eat healthy foods, exercise, get enough sleep, and find time to unwind.
- Encourage employees to talk with people they trust about their concerns and how they are feeling.
- Consider providing the staff with [mental health support service resources](#).

Lessons Learned After the Event

- Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for your venue to discuss and note lessons learned.
- Determine ways to improve the planning and implementation processes if the event will happen again.
- Update your plans regularly according to current local, provincial, and federal requirements.

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Preparing for When Someone Gets Sick

Event planners should consider several strategies to implement when someone gets sick.

Advise Staff of Isolation Requirements

- Communicate to sick staff members that they should not return to work until it is safe to do so based on public health recommendations.

Isolate Those Who are Sick

- Make sure that the staff and attendees know that they should not come to the event.
- Immediately separate staff and attendees with COVID-19 **symptoms** (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath) at the event. Individuals who are sick should go home immediately and seek medical treatment, if necessary.
- Individuals who have had **close contact** with a person who has **symptoms** should be separated, sent home, and advised to contact Southwestern Public Health at 1-800-922-0096 ext. 9.

Clean and Disinfect

- Close off areas used by a sick person and do not use these areas until after **cleaning and disinfecting** them (for outdoor areas, this includes surfaces or shared objects in the area, if applicable).

Notify Local Health Unit

- Notify SWPH if attendees become ill with COVID 19 symptoms or if there is a confirmed case of COVID 19 that attended your event.
- Provide SWPH with information as requested to assist with contact tracing.