

Guidance for indoor public settings during COVID-19

Including churches and religious ceremonies such as weddings, sports activities and facilities, meeting and event spaces, retail, personal service settings, and taxis

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Introduction: Preparing for success

As more people are vaccinated and restrictions are eased, there are still key steps that we can all take to reduce the risk of COVID-19. While it is important to protect everyone at your organization from the spread of COVID-19, organizations have a particular responsibility to protect their workers.

This guidance document is intended to provide safety information about the steps that your organization can take. Since the public health measures that organizations should take are now the same across most sectors, this document combines several previous guidance documents into one. **This guidance document is intended to be used in any setting that is open to the public.** The document is divided into four sections: safety measures for workers, policies and procedures at your organization, safety measures for patrons, and sector-specific information and resources.

In addition to the guidance in this document, consult the current [government of Ontario restrictions and guidance](#). Public health measures must include staying home if you are sick, handwashing, and covering coughs and sneezes. They may also include physical distancing, wearing a mask, and showing proof of vaccination. In general, it is safest to gather virtually or outdoors when possible.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is transmitted mainly through respiratory droplets and aerosols that people release from their noses and mouths. It can be spread over short or long distances. COVID-19 may be transmitted by people who have few or no symptoms of illness.

Safety measures for workers

Overview of your responsibilities regarding COVID-19 to your workers

Most restrictions have now been lifted. However, as restrictions loosen, this remains true: as an employer, you are responsible for the health and safety of anyone working in your workplace.

Many of the safety measures covered in this document are now optional. Keeping the measures that are relevant for your workplace—especially an up-to-date safety plan—can help you minimize current risks and adapt quickly. Consider how the physical features and types of interaction or activities in your workplace affect the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Thank you for keeping your workers safe and healthy.

Who is a worker?

Workers include, but are not limited to, staff, volunteers, contractors, vendors, and delivery drivers.

Workplace safety training

Train workers in your facility's COVID-19 policies and procedures so that they are prepared to lead by example and enforce requirements. Train workers in [proper PPE](#), [safely putting on and taking off a mask](#), [how to clean or dispose of single-use masks appropriately](#), [handwashing](#), and [respiratory etiquette](#). Training should be held online if possible or in small groups with physical distancing measures in place.

Create a vaccination policy for workers

The Timiskaming Health Unit has recommended, in the strongest possible terms, that all local employers institute a workplace COVID-19 vaccination policy for their business or organization. Instituting a COVID-19 vaccination policy is voluntary. Vaccination policies will help protect workplaces from shutting down in the event of an outbreak, prevent workers from getting sick, and encourage more people to get vaccinated.

The following resources have been created to help employers put vaccination policies in place: [Timiskaming Health Unit's COVID-19 vaccine policy support package for employers](#)
[Workplace vaccination policy webpage](#)

PPE: Masks and eye protection

- Workers may be required to wear appropriate PPE based on their level of risk, as outlined [here](#).
- In addition to masks and eye protection, workers may be required to wear other PPE depending on the task being performed (for example, cleaning).
- More information about when workers and patrons must wear a mask is available in the section "[Policies and procedures at your organization](#)."

Workspaces and staffing shifts

- It is recommended, but not required, that workers who are able to work from home do so.
- Rearrange workspaces to enable physical distancing and assign workers to their own dedicated work areas.
- Consider scheduling the same workers to work together for all shifts (cohorting).

Reduce risk in break and lunchrooms

- Stagger start times for breaks and lunches to limit in-person interaction.
- Rearrange rooms to enable physical distancing. Open up extra space for workers to use for breaks and meals to limit the number of people in these spaces.

Mental health and wellbeing

- Strive to create an atmosphere in which workers are comfortable discussing the issues that prevent them from being productive at work. Provide information on mental health resources to workers.
- Provide information on available leaves related to COVID-19, including the paid infectious disease emergency leave and unpaid infectious disease emergency leave. Information about [government financial resources](#) is available on THU's website.

Additional information for all workers

Consider supporting your workers with information to help them stay safe outside the workplace as well (for example, while commuting and on days off).

Additional information regarding contractors, vendors, and delivery drivers

Communicate public health measures to other people visiting your organization, for example contractors, vendors, and delivery drivers. These individuals must follow the public health measures that are in place at your organization, such as wearing a mask and using hand sanitizer before entering.

Reporting a case

If a worker lets you know that they have tested positive for COVID-19 and there is a possibility it could be related to the workplace, report the case within four days to

- (Required) [The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#) – email MLTSDocillness.notices@ontario.ca (Use subject 'Attention: Director')
- (Recommended) The workplace's joint health and safety committee
- (Recommended) The worker's trade union

Report to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) within three days ([WSIB.ca/report](https://www.wsib.ca/report)) if a worker either

- Notifies the workplace that they have tested positive for COVID-19 and there is a possibility it could be related to the workplace.
- Is injured while working either at the workplace or at home.

Policies and procedures at your organization

Safety plan

Businesses in Ontario are no longer required to have COVID-19 safety plans. The following resources are available for businesses that choose to keep safety plans in place: [Safety plan builder](#), [guide](#), and [checklist](#).

Mask and PPE requirements and resources

Masks and PPE are no longer required by law in all indoor public spaces and indoor workplaces. However, masks continue to be required **at all times** in indoor public settings for the people listed below, who are required to avoid activities where masks must be removed (for example, restaurant dining and fitness activities).

- For people whose [symptoms](#) have started or who have tested positive for [COVID-19](#) in the past 10 days.
- For people who are [close contacts](#) of someone with COVID-19 or who live with someone who is ill.
- In some settings, like public transit, health care, long-term care homes, and congregate living. Please refer to the [Government of Ontario guidance document for your workplace's sector](#) to know whether masks are still required.
- In individual businesses that opt to take additional precautions.

Children younger than two are exempt from masking requirements.

Signage about these requirements is available here. Businesses may choose to post these signs.

Masks required [English](#) [French](#).

There are many reasons to wear a mask. Be COVID kind to others—they may make different decisions from you. THU has created posters to encourage people to be COVID kind and to provide information about who is required to wear a mask. They can be used in businesses and workplaces, schools, childcare, and other settings.

Poster: There are many reasons to wear a mask. Be COVID kind. [English short version](#) | [English long version](#) | [French short version](#) | [French long version](#).

Where to purchase PPE: A list of PPE vendors can be found on the province's [PPE Supplier Directory](#).

Screening

Screening workers and customers is no longer required. People who feel ill, who have tested positive for COVID-19, and, in some circumstances, the people they live with, are still required to self-isolate.

Resources:

- Government of Ontario [COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#)
- Government of Ontario [COVID-19 employee and worker screening tool](#)
- THU entrance screening poster: [EN](#) [FR](#).

Capacity limits and maintaining a 2-meter physical distance

Limits on capacity related to COVID-19 are no longer in place. You must still adhere to non-COVID related capacity limits.

Maintaining physical distancing is no longer required. As long as people entering your facility have no symptoms of COVID-19, maintaining a distance less than 2 meters is considered a low-risk activity. If desired, you may continue to reduce capacity in order to enable physical distancing.

If you decide to maintain physical distancing, here are some points to consider:

- Activities can be modified to allow physical distancing between people, except members of the same household and caregivers.
- Adjust traffic flow to increase physical distancing. For example, designate separate entrance and exit doors and create one-way walk flow where possible.
- Install floor markings to encourage physical distancing. Floor markings can be used to designate waiting areas in a registration or washroom line, or in any other area where crowding may be an issue.
- Remove unnecessary furniture to free up more space. Chairs and tables can be stacked and roped off or removed to promote distancing. Consider leaving a small number of chairs accessible in case people need to rest.

Increase ventilation

Wherever possible, activities should be re-located to outdoor settings.

The risk of COVID-19 transmission is higher in enclosed and crowded spaces. You should ensure that air-handling (HVAC) systems are maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions and consider standards, such as those from the CSA and American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE).

Additional steps you can take are:

- use portable air cleaners
- keep windows and doors open as much as possible, including in colder weather
- adjust HVAC systems to increase the amount of fresh air and reduce recirculation
- continue ventilation and air exchange after regular business hours
- use available outdoor space whenever possible (for example, for meetings, breaks, interactions such as curbside pick-up)
- consider going beyond minimum standards if possible.

If fans are needed for temperature control, direct them upwards, away from people. High-powered fans may result in greater dispersion of droplets. Consider further reducing room capacity to maintain room temperature at manageable levels without the use of high-powered fans.

Attendance list for contact tracing

Keeping attendance records for contact tracing purposes is no longer required. People who test positive for COVID-19 are responsible for notifying their own contacts. If you would like to notify workers and attendees in the event that someone at your organization tests positive, you may opt to continue maintaining an attendance list. If you do so, people entering your facility should provide their name and contact information in a legible format.

Hand hygiene

Provide handwashing stations or alcohol-based hand sanitizer at entry, exit, and high-traffic locations. Everyone should perform hand hygiene when entering the facility. Handwashing stations or sanitizer should also be available at outdoor gatherings.

Cleaning and disinfection

Maintain the facility in a sanitary condition. In general, daily cleaning is recommended but adjust based on level of use. Focus cleaning on high traffic areas and frequently touched surfaces and objects (for example, door handles and light switches).

For more information, consult Public Health Ontario's fact sheet [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#).

Communication

- Use signage to inform everyone of the precautions that your organization is taking. While signage is no longer required, it may continue to be a good idea. For a link to all available posters, [click here](#).
- Include information about the precautions that your organization is taking in your regular communications to workers and people entering your facility. These communications may include posters, loudspeaker announcements, email, newsletter, website, or social media pages.

High-risk activities: cheering, shouting, singing, musical performance, sports and fitness

Cheering, shouting, and singing: Cheering loudly, shouting, and singing are high-risk activities.

- Music should be avoided or kept at a low volume to avoid the need to shout.
- People should not sing along to music.
- Microphones may be provided to reduce the need for shouting.
- People should be discouraged from shouting and cheering loudly.

Musical performance and congregational singing: Congregational singing and group performance involving singing and playing brass and wind instruments are permitted. However, singing and playing brass and wind instruments are considered higher risk activities. If these activities take place, you may want to take steps to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission:

- While singing, the congregation, members of a choir, and other performers may continue to wear masks and/or may be separated from all other people by 2 metres or an impermeable barrier. Distancing is generally considered to offer much better protection than barriers.
- Where possible and weather-permitting, group singing could be moved outdoors.
- Use a well-ventilated indoor space and open windows.
- Maintain physical distancing and/or limit capacity while singing.

Sports and fitness: Separate guidance is in place for sports activities and facilities. Please refer to the section "[sector-specific information and resources](#)" of this document.

Safety measures for patrons and customers

Working with vulnerable people and children

Consideration should be given to how to offer accommodations to vulnerable people such as seniors, people with disabilities, pregnant individuals, immunocompromised people, and children who are too young to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Note that this list is not comprehensive and that people may perceive themselves as vulnerable and prefer accommodations for many reasons. Examples of accommodations include physical distancing, reducing capacity limits, and offering virtual methods of engagement.

At the beginning of high risk activities such as singing and fitness, workers may issue a reminder that there may be increased risk of transmission in these settings. Group reminders are important because many health conditions are invisible.

Cancellation policies

If patrons or groups make appointments or bookings at your organization or facility, consider adjusting your cancellation policy to allow them to cancel or reschedule without penalty if they develop symptoms.

Arrival and reception

- Limit physical contact by using contactless payment and registration.
- Physical barriers are recommended to separate front desk attendants and other staff from customers.
- Provide handwashing stations or alcohol-based hand sanitizer at the entrance. Everyone should perform hand hygiene when entering the facility.
- Have medical masks available to give to people entering.

Proof of vaccination

While the Government of Ontario no longer requires proof of vaccination at businesses in certain settings, businesses can still have their own policies requiring proof of vaccination. Businesses should contact their legal council if they have any questions.

Resources:

- [Information for businesses and organizations about vaccine certificates](#) (Government of Ontario)
- [Proof of COVID-19 vaccination](#) (Government of Ontario)

Sector-specific information and resources

Additional information and resources for public settings are below. For guidance documents and resources for additional sectors, [click here](#).

Meeting and event spaces

- Meeting and event spaces are considered public spaces, even when booked by a private group, and public health measures must be followed.

Taxi services, volunteer drivers, and passengers

- Physical distancing
 - Passengers should sit in the rear seats to maintain the greatest physical distance possible from the driver. If there is only one passenger, they should sit in the passenger-side rear seat.
 - Install a physical barrier such as plexiglass between the front and back seats.
- Improve ventilation
 - Open car windows to allow for airflow.
 - Use the vehicle climate control system and windows to improve fresh air intake and air circulation.
 - Avoid using the recirculated air option.
- If the passenger is being transported to or from a hospital or health care setting and/or is displaying respiratory symptoms, take additional precautions.
 - The passenger must wear a mask if they have symptoms.
 - It is recommended that the driver also wear a mask, especially if a plexiglass barrier is not in place.
 - Improving ventilation is particularly important in this situation.

Public settings

- [Reducing COVID-19 risk in community settings: A tool for operators](#) (Government of Canada)

Wedding planning

- [Fact sheet for Planning a Wedding during COVID-19](#) (Timiskaming Health Unit)

Fitness facilities, group fitness, and personal training

- [Fact Sheet for sports activities and facilities during COVID-19](#) (Timiskaming Health Unit)
- [National](#) and [provincial](#) sport organizations

Summer camps

- [COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for Summer Camps](#) (Government of Ontario)

Community gardens

- [Guidance for community gardens](#) (Timiskaming Health Unit)