

Indoor & Outdoor Events and Gatherings: What you need to know during the COVID-19 Pandemic

October 27, 2020

The following document is intended to help organizers of events and gatherings understand their responsibilities to ensure a safe and successful event during the COVID-19 pandemic. Proper preparation and planning prior to and during an event is essential to help reduce the potential spread of COVID-19.

All planners, organizers, operators of events/gatherings, regardless of their purpose and size, have a responsibility to assess COVID-19 risks associated with their event/gathering and must be able to mitigate these risks. All gatherings are also required to ensure that applicable gathering limits are complied with as per [Ontario Regulation 364/20](#). Huron Perth Public Health has also developed a fact sheet outlining the provincial gathering limits and can be found on our website and in [Appendix A](#) below.

You are responsible for implementing measures to reduce the risk of infection among all those who participate in and organize your events/gatherings (e.g. staff, performers, volunteers, attendees).

These measures include but are not limited to:

- Not allowing ill people to be at the event
- Helping people maintain a two metre/six foot distance from others, when possible:
 - Manage lines or crowds of people at entrance and exit points and around the perimeter of the event/gathering space.
- Encouraging frequent handwashing, and discouraging touching the face with unwashed hands.
- Encouraging excellent respiratory etiquette: Coughing and/or sneezing into one's own elbow
- Requiring the wearing of mask or face covering for those in indoor public spaces when two metre/six foot distance cannot be maintained; this principle should also be encouraged while in outdoor spaces as well.
- Following the [local Medical Officer of Health's instructions](#) and applicable provincial legislation
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces

- Checking in with your local municipality to determine if there are any special requirements for obtaining a permit prior to organizing the event/gathering.

COVID-19 mitigation and safety measures are a new expectation and must enhance or align with any pre-existing permit requirements, health and safety practices, public health instructions or conditions.

Provincial Orders

Provincial orders under the *Reopening Ontario Act* and associated regulations, and/or guidance related to events and social gatherings, are subject to change at any time. We encourage you to monitor the [Ontario Newsroom](#), [Ontario Regulation 364/20 – Rules for Areas in Stage 3](#) and the [Huron Perth Public Health website](#) regularly for updated guidance.

Under the [Province’s Stage 3 framework](#), any indoor or outdoor event or gathering is subject to various COVID-19 prevention requirements. These must be followed. Specific requirements can also be found in [Ontario Regulation 364/20 – Rules for Areas in Stage 3](#) and the provincial [Guidance for Meeting and Event Facilities During COVID-19](#).

Indoor and Outdoor Events

Indoor and outdoor events/gatherings covered within this guidance include:

- Concerts and live entertainment shows (including performing arts)
- Meetings and/or conferences (includes but not limited to trade shows, retreats, professional meetings)
- Movie theatres/cinemas (includes Drive-In style events)
- All other organized or spontaneous indoor and outdoor events and social gatherings (e.g. seasonal parties, fundraisers, fairs, wedding receptions, funeral receptions).

Changes to Gathering Limits

On September 19, 2020, the Provincial government changed gathering limits due to an increase in COVID-19 cases. Refer to [Appendix A](#) for information.

Unmonitored private/public events and social gatherings:

- Maximum of 10 persons indoors (previous limit of 50)
- Maximum of 25 persons outdoors (previous limit of 100)

This includes social gatherings/events occurring at private residences, backyards, parks and other recreational areas (e.g. functions, parties, dinners, BBQs and wedding receptions). Public health and physical distancing measures should be considered during an unmonitored private/public event or social gathering. Note: Staff, workers and hired performers do not count towards gathering limits.

Events taking place in a business or space permitted to be open under Stage 3

The following gathering limits are applicable to events/gatherings taking place in a business or space that is permitted to be open and operating under Stage 3. Staff, workers and hired performers do not count towards gathering limits:

- Maximum of 50 members of the public/spectators indoors**
- Maximum of 100 members of the public/spectators outdoors

***Where an event is partially indoors and outdoors, indoor limits apply.*

Huron Perth Public Health recommends that reduced gathering limits¹ be applied to private events/social gatherings where no staff from the business/organization providing the rentable space are present during the event/gathering.

Please note the following restrictions:

- Indoor capacity limits apply to events that are fully or partially indoors.
- Indoor events and gatherings cannot be combined with an outdoor event or gathering to increase the applicable gathering size.
- The number of people permitted shall be limited so that every attendee at an event or gathering is able to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres/six feet from every other person.
- All staff, performers, workers and others providing service for the event/gathering must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres/six feet from every other person, except:
 - if it is necessary for the performers to be closer to each other for the purposes of the performance or rehearsal;
 - where necessary to facilitate the purchase of admission, food or beverages; or
 - where necessary for the purposes of health and safety.
- The gathering limits and physical distancing requirements also apply to organized public events and social gatherings held within private dwellings.

Gathering limit exceptions

- Indoor gatherings for the purposes of a religious service, rite and ceremony (e.g. wedding) or funeral service are limited to up to **30% of the venue's capacity**.
 - Note: Social gatherings associated with a wedding, funeral or religious service, rite or ceremony (e.g. receptions) must comply with Stage 3 indoor and outdoor gathering limits as applicable based on the venue and location where the social gathering is held.

¹ Reduced Gathering Limits: 10 persons at an indoor event, 25 persons at an outdoor event.

- Cinemas may permit up to 50 customers *per auditorium*.
- Multi-purpose and large venues with multiple rooms (e.g. banquet halls, convention centres) may permit up to 50 people per room.
- Drive in and drive thru venues are not subject to gathering limits.
- Festivals and mass gathering events (e.g. parades, fall fairs) are strongly discouraged at this time.

COVID-19 Transmission and Reducing Risk

COVID-19 is an illness that is spread mainly from person-to-person through close contact from respiratory droplets of someone infected with COVID-19. The respiratory droplets can travel up to two metres/six feet when we cough, sneeze or talk. The *more* people an individual interacts with at a gathering and the *longer* that interaction lasts, the higher the potential risk of COVID-19 infection and spread.

It is possible for a person to get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. Some studies have shown that the virus can survive on plastic and stainless steel surfaces for up to 72 hours. More information about COVID-19 can be found on the [Huron Perth Public Health website](#).

Measures to keep everyone safe include:

Physical Distancing

- Physical distancing means keeping a distance of two metres/six feet from others. Plan and modify the layout of your setting to ensure enough space is provided for attendees, vendors, performers and staff to maintain physical distancing.
- Calculate the maximum number of attendees permitted according to current provincial regulations or physical distancing requirements, whichever is less. Limit the number of attendees accordingly.
 - The maximum number of patrons that should be permitted at any one time based on physical distancing requirements can be calculated as one person per four square metres or 43 square feet of publicly accessible floor space.
 - Consider a booking system or issuing tickets, even for free events.

Modify programming

- Consider virtual options (e.g. live streaming, pre-recorded shows, small acoustic concerts, solo performances, or virtual reality and other digital experiences).
- Where possible, hold events outdoors instead of indoors.
- Determine if a drive-in or drive-thru option may work for your event
- Limit or cancel activities where physical distancing or other appropriate COVID-19 controls cannot be implemented, such as patrons standing by the stage, moshing and crowd surfing, photo opportunities, autographs, backstage access, etc.

- Offer more events/gatherings at a reduced capacity rather than hosting a single large event/ gathering (e.g. offer multiple, staggered activities with a limit on the number of attendees).
- Allow sufficient time between events/gatherings to allow safe and distanced exit and entry, and sufficient environmental cleaning in between.
- Keep the duration of the event/gathering to a minimum to limit contact among attendees.
- Close or restrict access to non-essential common areas (e.g. photo booth with props, merchandise kiosks, concession stands, and communal lounges).
- Discourage activities that can contribute to the spread of COVID-19 (e.g. singing, cheering, dancing, playing wind instruments, hugging), and encourage alternative practices, where applicable (e.g. humming, clapping, noisemakers, waving).

Modify and arrange site/floor plan

- Arrange, mark and/or assign seating to ensure no more than 10 people per table, and minimum two metres/six feet distance between individuals who are not members of the same household or social circle.
- Design an attendee flow that encourages one-way movement with prominent signage and/or floor markings.
- Increase floor marking and aisle signage to allow people to find their seats more easily.
- Ensure enough space for people in high traffic areas, between chairs, tables, and places where people may gather.
- Identify areas where crowding and bottlenecks are common, such as lobbies or bathrooms, and use volunteers, staff or barriers to redirect people who may gather in these areas.
- Ensure a minimum distance of at least two metres/six feet between performers and audience seating by blocking off the front two rows of spectator seating, if necessary.
- A plexiglass shield or other impermeable barrier is required between singers and players of brass or wind instruments and any spectators.

Manage lines and gatherings that form within and outside the event

- Use barriers/structures to enclose the event space/venue and manage capacity and pedestrian traffic flow.
- Designate and manage entry and exit points to control the number of attendees. If the maximum number of attendees is reached, allow one person in for every person that leaves.
- Stagger arrivals, departures and breaks, where possible, to reduce congestion at points of entrance and exit and in common areas.
- Monitor and manage customer lines within and outside the venue.
- Post [physical distancing signs \[PDF\]](#) at all entrances, kiosks and/or service counters.
- Place visual/textural markers spaced two metres/six feet apart (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) to encourage physical distancing and guide attendees.

- Discourage people from gathering outside the venue.
- Assign staff to monitor lines and to make public announcements reminding attendees to keep two metres/six feet apart.

Ticket and concession kiosks/booths

- Encourage online or telephone ticket purchases to minimize lineups at the ticket/service counter.
- Include staggered arrival times to the ticket process to limit on-site queueing.
- Install physical barriers at the point of sale (e.g. plexiglass shield).
- Encourage electronic payment by debit or credit card, and to tap instead of using the PIN pad.
- Use a contactless transaction process to exchange concessions and/or scan tickets.

Masks Use and Face Coverings

- Follow the [Chief Medical Officer of Health's instructions](#) for face coverings and applicable legislative requirements under O. Reg 364/20 s. 2(4).
- Some exceptions apply, including children under the age of two, and people with medical conditions that make wearing a mask difficult. Full list of exemptions are found in the Chief Medical Officer of Health's instructions and under s. 2(4) or O. Reg 364/20.
- Business operators must develop a policy and procedure on the wearing of masks.
- Masks or face coverings are strongly recommended outdoors when physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Recommended during both indoor and outdoor private events when physical distancing of 2 metres or 6 feet cannot be maintained.
- Educate staff on the proper use and disposal of masks

Personal Hygiene

- Download and post [handwashing signs \[PDF\]](#) in high traffic areas.
- Provide hand sanitizer dispensers (70-90% alcohol concentration) by entrances and throughout the venue for everyone to use.
- Ensure an adequate supply of liquid soap, paper towel, hand sanitizer, tissues, and waste receptacles throughout the venue and in washrooms.

COVID-19 Screening for Event/Gathering Attendees

- Consider pre-event/gathering communications to attendees to share information on protocols and expected behaviours.
- Reinforce the message that people must not attend if they are ill.
- Use HPPH posters to encourage passive screening before entering the venue.

- Direct anyone who answers YES to any of the screening questions or identifies that they are feeling ill to go home immediately, self-isolate, and contact a health care provider for an assessment.
 - [HPPH Screening Tool for Employers \[fillable PDF\]](#)
 - [Passive Screening STOP: COVID-19 poster \[PDF\]](#)

COVID-19 Outbreak Preparedness and Contact Tracing

- Develop protocols in advance that specifically address how to safely care for attendees who develop COVID-19 related symptoms, or who need care (e.g. injury, illness, emotional upset) while at the event/gathering.
- Designate a space where attendees can be isolated from others if they develop symptoms or have been exposed to COVID-19 until they can go home safely in a private vehicle and/or undergo medical assessment.
- Keep a list of names and contact information for all individuals who attend the event/gathering. Huron Perth Public Health will use this list to notify and provide instructions for close contacts to self-isolate or self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms.
- Contact Huron Perth Public Health at 1-888-221-2133 - COVID Intake for guidance if you have been notified that an employee, vendor, performer or attendee has tested positive, and/or you have concerns that others may have been exposed to a person with COVID-19 at the event/gathering.
- Any personal information that is collected for the purposes of COVID-19 contact tracing can only be used for this purpose, unless an individual provides their consent. Records should only be kept for 30 days, and then shredded.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Avoid opportunities for the virus to spread through high touch surfaces (tables, chairs, railings, doors etc.), either directly or indirectly
- Assign staff to complete environmental cleaning and disinfection duties.
- Ensure frequent cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces and objects in staff, vendor, performer and patron areas (e.g. doorknobs, tabletops, railings) at least twice a day and when visibly dirty.
 - Review [Public Health Ontario's Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings fact sheet \[PDF\]](#).
 - Refer to Health Canada's [list of hard surface disinfectants for use against coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).
- Ensure washrooms and hand sinks are cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day, or as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary environment.
- Provide waste receptacles lined with a plastic bag, and empty as often as necessary.

Workplace Health and Safety

- Assign a site safety manager to ensure updated working protocols reflect good hygiene and safe working conditions.
- Actively screen staff before each work shift and prior to participating in the event. Questions can be completed on paper, online, or by asking staff directly.
- Implement attendance policies for staff, including maintaining a list of the names, contact information and attendance records for all staff, including performers and vendors.
- Train staff on all new policies and protocols related to COVID-19 prevention, including physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and local Medical Officer of Health's mask instructions.
- Consider alternate approaches to rehearsals or performances that typically require close contact.
- Where work requires the shared handling of goods and/or close contact, ensure proper mask/face covering and hygiene protocols are implemented.
- Ensure dedicated use of high exposure items (e.g. microphones), and frequent disinfecting of high-touch equipment.

Food and Drink

- Venues that serve food and drink must also comply with Ontario Regulation 364/20 –Rules for Areas in Stage 3, Ontario Regulation 493/17 – Food Premises and provincial guidance for restaurants and bars while operating during COVID-19
- Where food and drink is served, guests must remain seated except to use the washroom, placing, picking up or paying for an order entering and exiting the area, or for the purposes of health and safety.
- Plated meals are preferred.
- Family-style meals are permitted if guests are seated only with members of their immediate family where possible as the use of a social circle is paused provincially at this time.
- Communal and self-serve food services (e.g. buffets, passing of hors-d'oeuvres) are not permitted at this time.

Entertainment

If concerts, artistic events, theatrical performances or other performances are rehearsed or performed during the event they must follow applicable provincial gathering limits outlined in Ontario Regulation 364/20.

All performers that dance, sing or perform music at the event must ensure the following are in place:

- Singers and players of brass or wind instruments must be separated from any spectators by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier.

- Every performer and other person must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person, except:
 - if it is necessary for the performers to be closer to each other for the purposes of the performance or rehearsal,
 - where necessary for the purposes of facilitating the purchase of admission, food or beverages, or
 - where necessary for the purposes of health and safety.

The public may sing or perform music at the establishment if:

- they are not singing or performing music in a private karaoke room;
- they are separated from every other person, including from other performers, by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier while singing or while performing on a brass or wind instrument;
- they maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person while singing or performing music; and
- any equipment used by members of the public while singing or performing music is cleaned and disinfected between each use.

Communication

- Provide information to staff and attendees about event/venue operations (e.g. public health measures, available amenities) through different communication platforms (e.g. event webpage, email social media accounts).
- Encourage staff and attendees to download the [COVID Alert app](#) so they can be notified directly if they have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.
- Download and display posters in high visibility areas in your setting to promote messages about how to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic:
 - Physical Distancing
 - Face & Mask Coverings
 - Protect Yourself
 - Information about COVID-19
 - Wash your Hands
 - Cover your Cough
 - Screen Posters for Entrances.

For more information

Call Huron Perth Public Health at 1-888-221-2133 or [visit us online](#).

Appendix A

[Gathering Limits Fact Sheet \[PDF\]](#)