

Managing the Risks of COVID-19: Events and Gatherings

The following document is intended to help organizers of public events and gatherings – such as meetings, festivals, concerts, outdoor markets etc., ensure a safe and successful event as we learn to manage COVID-19 in our communities. Proper preparation and planning prior to and during an event is essential to help reduce the potential spread of COVID-19.

COVID-19 is still a serious disease and continues to circulate in Huron and Perth Counties. COVID-19 can lead to hospitalization, long COVID or death. It's very important that organizers of events consider their risk, the risk of others, and how to best lower the risk at an event or gathering.

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 mitigate these risks. All gatherings are required to comply with current regulatory requirements under [O. Reg. 364/20: RULES FOR AREAS AT STEP 3 AND AT THE ROADMAP EXIT STEP](#) along with any advice, recommendations and instructions issued by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, or by a medical officer of health made after consultation with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Note: If you are a highest risk setting (i.e. long-term care or retirement home, congregate living setting) you must continue to follow public health measures required by the province.

Risk of COVID-19 Transmission

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. Monitor regional and Huron Perth COVID-19 rates to inform your planning. For more information on COVID-19, visit <http://www.hpph.ca/> or <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/>.

How to reduce the risk at your event

Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) strongly encourages event organizers to assess the risk of COVID-19 transmission at their event. The following can contribute to an increased risk of COVID-19 transmission at your event or gathering:

- **Indoors vs. outdoors:** Indoor events carry a level of risk greater than those held outdoors.
- **Number of people:** If there are large numbers of people at an event, attendees don't have as many opportunities to physically distance. Also, larger numbers of people mean there is an increased risk of close interactions among those in attendance.
- **High risk attendees, volunteers and/or staff:** The following groups of individuals are at increased risk for severe outcomes in the event they are exposed to COVID-19. Consider increased measures to reduce risk for these groups:
 - People of advanced age
 - People living in congregate living settings
 - Those with underlying health conditions
 - Those who are unvaccinated

As an organizer of an event or gathering, consider the following types of measures to reduce the risk of infection among all those who participate, attend and organize your public events or gatherings:

Indoors vs. Outdoors

- Use outdoor spaces as much as possible
- Improve ventilation (opening doors/windows) if using an indoor space
- Consider virtual options for your event or gathering (e.g. live streaming, pre-recorded shows, small acoustic concerts, solo performances, and other digital experiences).
- If hosting an event, meeting or gathering indoors, look to reduce the number in attendance to allow for physical distancing. Use of masks indoors will further reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Screening

- Complete active screening of employees

- Ensure screening is in place for those in attendance (at minimum passive screening; active screening is more effective).
- Encourage sick people to stay home
- Train staff on all policies and protocols related to COVID-19 prevention, including physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and any recommendations made by the local medical officer of health.

Physical Distancing

- Promote physical distancing
- Manage lines or crowds of people at entrances and exit points and also around the perimeter of the event and in spaces where people will gather
- Designate and manage entry and exit points to control the number and congregation of attendees.
- Stagger arrivals, departures and breaks, where possible, to reduce congestion at points of entrance and exit and in common areas.
- Post [physical distancing signs](#) [PDF] at all entrances, kiosks and/or service counters.
- Discourage people from congregating outside the venue or room where events or gatherings are held
- If seating and/or tables are provided, reduce tables and/or reduce the number of seats available per table. If you are hosting a meeting, consider limiting attendees.
- For outdoor or indoor markets, organize vendor tables in a manner to reduce patrons from congregating
- If you choose to serve food or beverages at your event or gathering, do so in a manner that avoids crowding (e.g. provide table service vs. buffet)

Masks and Face Coverings

- Encourage the use of face coverings while indoors and/or outdoors where physical distancing cannot be maintained
- Please note that if you are considering requiring the use of face coverings, you must follow any applicable laws (e.g., Human Rights Code, Occupational Health and Safety Standards) and should obtain independent legal advice should you consider doing so.

Gathering Limits at a Public Event or Gathering

Public Health continues to recommend taking a cautious approach when planning for events and gatherings. Consider the following when determining the size of your event from an attendee perspective:

- Offer events/gatherings at a reduced or limited capacity rather than hosting a single large event/gathering (e.g. offer multiple, staggered activities with a limit on the number of attendees).
- If there are large numbers of people at an event, attendees don't have as many opportunities to physically distance. Also, larger numbers of people mean there is an increased risk of close interactions among those in attendance.
- If high risk individuals may be attending, especially consider the above to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Event and Gathering Health and Safety

- Check in with your local municipality to determine if there are any special requirements for obtaining a permit prior to organizing the event/gathering
- If you are a business or organization – reach out to your health and safety or human resource departments to better understand current COVID-19 policies or expectations
- Assign a site safety manager to ensure updated working protocols reflect good hygiene and safe working conditions.
- Actively screen staff, volunteers before each work shift and prior to participating in the event. Refer to [Ontario's screening resources](#) for more information.
- Train staff on all policies and protocols related to COVID-19 prevention, including physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and any recommendations made by the local Medical Officer of Health
- Where work requires the shared handling of goods and/or close contact, encourage the use of proper mask/face coverings and establish hygiene protocols (cleaning and disinfection of surfaces/equipment after use).
- If using shared items (e.g. microphones), consider assigning items to only individuals who require them. If an item must be shared, ensure frequent disinfecting occurs.
- 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.

- Limit activities where possible 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).

Proof of Vaccination

- Determine if the venue or location you wish to hold your event or gathering at has any policies related to vaccination
- Consider requiring proof of vaccination for entry to an event or gathering
- Please note that if you are considering requiring proof of vaccination, you must follow any applicable laws (e.g., Human Rights Code, Occupational Health and Safety Standards) and should obtain independent legal advice should you consider doing so.

Continue and Promote Best Practices

- Encourage handwashing
 - 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.
- Encourage excellent respiratory etiquette: Coughing and/or sneezing into one's own elbow
- Clean and disinfect frequently
 - 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).

- Clean and disinfect washrooms and hand sinks 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.

Communication

- 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.
- 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. You can find these posters in our [Managing COVID-19: Operator Toolkit](#):
 - Physical Distancing
 - Face & Mask Coverings
 - Protect Yourself
 - Information about COVID-19
 - Wash your Hands
 - Cover your Cough
 - Screening Posters for Entrances.

For more information

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