

Guidance for outdoor public settings & community gardens during COVID-19

June 2, 2022

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 transmission. This fact sheet is intended to provide safety information about the steps to take in outdoor public settings, including community gardens.

Public health measures must include staying home if you are sick, frequent handwashing, and covering coughs and sneezes. They may also include physical distancing and wearing a mask. Over time, you may decide to change the measures that your organization takes based on the COVID-19 situation in our community, the number of vulnerable people who use your outdoor public settings, how your space is used, or other factors.

In addition to the guidance in this document, you may want to consult the following resources:

- The current [government of Ontario restrictions and guidance](#)
- The [Timiskaming Health Unit Guidance for indoor public settings](#) has additional recommendations that may be useful for your setting, particularly if your organization has workers (including volunteers) and for sports and fitness activities.
- The [Timiskaming Health Unit workplace webpage](#)

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.

Risk summary

Going outdoors and exercising are good for your physical and mental health. The risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus in outdoor settings like community gardens is lower than indoors. Distancing is usually easier to maintain outdoors and there is more air circulation.

Safety measures for 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.

Workers include, but are not limited to, staff, volunteers, contractors, vendors, and delivery drivers. If your organization has workers, please read the section “Safety measures for workers” in the [Timiskaming Health Unit Guidance for indoor public settings](#) to know which precautions you should take.

Safety plan

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

Mask and PPE requirements and resources

Masks and PPE are not required in outdoor public settings. However, there are many reasons to wear a mask, and some people may choose to wear a mask in outdoor settings. Be kind and respectful of others' decisions, and encourage everyone in your setting to do the same.

Screening

Screening people entering outdoor public settings is not 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.

Under current provincial self-isolation rules, people who are self-isolating may leave home for independent outdoor exercise or exercise with a caregiver. People who are self-isolating must maintain a 2 metre (6 feet) distance from others and avoid participating in in-person fitness with others. People who are self-isolating may use an outdoor public setting for exercise if the circumstances above are met.

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](#)
- [THU self-isolation webpage](#)

Maintaining a 2-meter (6 feet) physical distance

Maintaining a 2-meter physical distance from others is not required. However, it continues to be an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19, both indoors and outdoors.

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 circumstance that someone tests positive, you may opt to continue maintaining an attendance list. If you do so, people using your outdoor space should provide their name and contact information in a legible format.

Hand hygiene

Handwashing stations or sanitizer should be available when entering or exiting your outdoor space and at gatherings or events that you host.

Cleaning and disinfection

Maintain facilities, washrooms, and shared equipment in a sanitary condition. Focus cleaning on high traffic areas and frequently touched surfaces and objects.

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 they should take in your outdoor space. While signage is not required in indoor or outdoor settings, it may 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 outdoor space. 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

Note that cheering, shouting, singing, musical performance, and sports and fitness are high-risk activities. Performing these activities outdoors is a good way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Practicing physical distancing and masking during these activities are additional precautions that you can take to reduce risk.

Sports and fitness: Separate guidance is in place for sports activities and facilities. Please refer to the [Timiskaming Health Unit Guidance for indoor public settings](#), the [Fact Sheet for Sports Activities and Facilities during COVID-19](#), and [National](#) and [provincial](#) sports organizations for more information about the precautions that you should take during sports and fitness.

Public health measures for community gardens

- Gardeners should avoid sharing personal materials such as garden gloves and water bottles.
- Use hand hygiene practices and wash or sanitize your hands after taking off your gloves.
- Follow standard safety practices in food preparation. Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running potable water, and wash your hands with soap and water before washing fruits and veggies and between handling different kinds of foods.
- Community garden coordinators may develop an operations plan specific to each garden that includes COVID-19 prevention strategies. Consider garden-specific factors such as the size of the gardens, the layout of the gardens, the proximity of plots to each other, and the common areas and amenities on-site. Landowners may want to view a copy of this plan to provide feedback and approval. You should provide this plan to gardeners.

Please call Timiskaming Health Unit at 705-647-4305 if you have any questions.