

GATHERINGS, ETHNO-CULTURAL AND FESTIVE OCCASIONS, AND OTHER EVENTS

Version 3 – November 25, 2020

Final public health advice for events and gatherings will be based on the epidemiology of COVID-19 at that time and in that community and will consider the potential risks of the activities associated with the holiday or event. **If necessary, the advice may include cancellation of the event.**

Communications should be targeted to participants and organizers of events, as both are responsible for adhering to current social gathering and organized public event restrictions and ensuring public health advice and measures are followed.

For religious services, rites or ceremonies, the Ministry of Health has issued [Advice for Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#) which would apply to these specific services.

General Advice on Close Contact, and Gatherings and Events¹

In all Zones – Green (Prevent), Yellow (Protect), Orange (Restrict), Red (Control), and Grey (Lockdown)

- Limit close contact to your household (the people you live with).
 - Individuals who live alone, including seniors, may consider having exclusive, close contact with another household to help reduce the negative impacts of social isolation.
- Maintain two metres of physical distancing from everyone else.
- Wear a face covering indoors, outdoors if physical distancing cannot be maintained, or if wearing one is required.
- Virtual gatherings or events are the safest way to visit or recognize occasions with people outside your household.

¹ Advice is general and may be modified or supplemented based on the epidemiology of COVID-19 at the time. See appendices for specific advice.

- Adhere to provincial and applicable local restrictions on public and private gatherings ([O. Reg. 82/20](#), [O. Reg. 263/20](#) or [O. Reg. 364/20](#)).

Additional key messages for Red (Control) Zones:

- Trips outside of the home should only be for essential reasons (work, school, groceries/pharmacy, health care, assisting vulnerable individuals, or exercise and physical activity).
- Families should not visit any other households or allow visitors in their homes.
- Everyone should avoid social gatherings.
- Work remotely, where possible.

Additional key messages for Grey (Lockdown) Zones:

- Trips outside of the home should only be for essential reasons (work, school, groceries/pharmacy, health care, assisting vulnerable individuals or exercise and physical activity).
- No indoor organized public events and social gatherings are permitted, except with members of the same household. If you live alone, you are permitted to gather indoors with one other household.
- Work remotely, where possible.

The tone of the key messages should become more urgent as public health unit regions move through the zones. For example:

- Green (Prevent) – Advise
- Yellow (Protect) – Recommend
- Orange (Restrict) – Strongly Recommend
- Red (Control) – Limit
- Grey (Lockdown) – Prohibit

Gathering Limits by Zone, under the Regulations (as of November 25, 2020)

Green (Prevent), Yellow (Protect), and Orange (Restrict):

- Limits for certain organized public events and social gatherings such as functions, parties, dinners, or wedding receptions held in private residences, backyards, or parks where physical distancing can be maintained:
 - 10 people indoors or
 - 25 people outdoors
- Limits for organized public events and social gatherings such as events and gatherings in staffed businesses and facilities where physical distancing can be maintained:
 - 50 people indoors or
 - 100 people outdoors

Red (Control):

- Limit for all organized public events and social gatherings where physical distancing can be maintained:
 - 5 people indoors or
 - 25 people outdoors

Grey (Lockdown):

- No indoor organized public events and social gatherings are permitted, except with members of the same household.
 - Individuals who live alone, including seniors, may consider having exclusive, close contact with another household.
- Limit for outdoor organized public events and social gatherings where physical distancing can be maintained:
 - 10 people outdoors

Other Key Messages

- The fewer people you have contact with the lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- It is important to remember that just because you know someone, it does not reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19.

- Stay home if you have [symptoms](#), even if they are mild.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly.
- Cover your cough.
- Download the COVID Alert mobile app.
- Get tested if you have symptoms compatible with COVID-19, or if you've been advised of exposure by your local public health unit or through the COVID Alert mobile app.

Refer to Appendix A for advice specific to the winter holidays and other events.

APPENDIX A: ADVICE ON GATHERING AND EVENT SCENARIOS

Hosting a gathering, including holiday, New Year's Eve, and other parties (for individuals and families in Green [Prevent], Yellow [Protect], and Orange [Restrict] Zones)

Virtual gatherings and virtual events are the safest way to visit or celebrate occasions with people outside your household.

At this time, it is strongly advised that you only have close contact with the people you live with, even when celebrating or recognizing occasions when you would normally gather with others. People who live alone may consider having exclusive close contact with one additional household to help reduce feelings of isolation and negative mental health impacts.

If you have a gathering with people you don't live with:

- The fewer people, the lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Maintain physical distancing of at least two metres, whether the gathering is indoors or outdoors.
- Adhere to provincial legal restrictions on public and private gatherings ([O. Reg. 364/20](#)). Local restrictions may also apply.

It is important to remember that just because you know someone, it does not reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Keep following good public health practises.

If you choose to host an in-person gathering:

- Ask guests to not attend if they have symptoms, even if they are mild.
- Determine how many people can easily maintain physical distancing in the space, without exceeding the gathering limits.
 - You should keep your gathering as small as possible and use outdoor spaces whenever possible.
- Promote physical distancing, including by arranging seating in advance to appropriately space household groups.

- Provide all the necessary supplies such as hand sanitizer, soap and water.
- Plan for how guests will use the washroom to limit people touching the same objects and ensuring it is clean.
- Open windows, if possible.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces.
- Make a list of guests in case public health needs it for contact tracing.
- Remind people to follow public health advice during the gathering, including physical distancing and wearing a face covering indoors and wearing one outdoors if physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- If you choose to serve food or drinks at your gathering, you should:
 - Follow food safety [guidelines](#).
 - Wash your hands before and frequently during preparation.
 - Avoid potluck and buffet-style food service and make a plan for how you will physically distance while distributing and cleaning up food (e.g., bring your own food).
 - Have food on individual plates to prevent your guests from passing and touching the same objects.
 - Have everyone wash their hands before and after eating.

If you choose to attend an in-person gathering:

- You should not attend if you have any symptoms, even if they are mild, or if you are in quarantine or self-isolating.
- Limit close contact to the people you live with.
- Always maintain two metres physical distancing from everyone else.
- Wear a face covering indoors and wear one outdoors if physical distancing may not be maintained.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer regularly throughout the gathering.
- Ask in advance what the plan is for using washrooms and providing food or drinks. You should ensure that people are not touching the same objects **or coming closer than 2 metres with others.**

- Consider participating virtually or not attending the gathering if you are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19, including if you are 70 years or older, are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions.

New Year's Eve parties

- New Year's Eve parties at businesses (e.g., restaurant, bar and other food and drink establishments, meeting and event spaces, etc.) are subject to provincial restrictions on public and private gatherings ([O. Reg. 364/20](#)). Local restrictions may also apply.

Travel

International Travel

- Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others.
- Individuals and families should refrain from travelling internationally over the holiday period. If you do, you will need to meet legal [quarantine](#) requirements upon your return to Canada even if you do not have symptoms.

Inter-provincial Travel

- Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others.
- Individuals and families who consider travelling to another province for essential reasons during the holidays should:
 - Consider the risk associated with travelling. This includes COVID-19 transmission in the other province, entry requirements (e.g., quarantine) of some other provinces, etc.
 - Self-quarantine, or drastically reduce close contact with others 10 to 14 days *before travelling and after returning* home. This will help lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- General (Ontario) public health advice, as well as any rules and regulations of the other province, should be followed.

Travel within Ontario

Individuals and families in higher transmission areas should avoid travel to lower transmission areas (e.g., from Red to Orange, from Yellow to Green) except for essential reasons.

In Red (Control) and Grey (Lockdown) Zones:

- Trips outside of the home should only be for essential reasons (work, school, groceries/pharmacy, health care, assisting vulnerable individuals, or exercise and physical activity).
- Families should not visit any other households or allow visitors in their homes. Close contact should only be with those you live with.

University, college, and other students returning home for the holidays:

- Individuals living away from home, including those studying at colleges and universities, should consider doing a self-quarantine, or drastically reducing close contact with others, 10 to 14 days before returning home for the holidays. This will help lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Individuals unable to reduce close contact with others before returning home, should limit close contact with others, especially seniors and individuals who are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions.
- International students who travel home will need to quarantine, and follow other institutional protocols, upon their return to Canada.
 - Students should also inquire about their home country's testing requirements before leaving.

If you are considering travel and/or overnight stays:

- Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others.
- Ensure you adhere to provincial restrictions on public and private gatherings ([O. Reg. 82/20](#), [O. Reg. 263/20](#) or [O. Reg. 364/20](#)). Gathering limits vary by zone, and local restrictions may also apply. In **Grey (Lockdown) Zones**, indoor organized public events

and social gatherings with people outside of your household are not permitted. If you live alone, you are permitted to gather indoors with one other household.

- Consider self-quarantine, or drastically reduce close contact with others 10 to 14 days *before travelling and after returning* home. This will help lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Consider whether you, someone you live with, or anyone you plan to visit with is at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, to determine whether to stay overnight in the same residence or to stay elsewhere.
- Consider and prepare for what you will do if you, or someone else, becomes ill during the visit.
 - What are the plans for self-isolation, health care, and travel home?

If permitted, and you do stay at another home overnight or host overnight guests:

- Provide all the necessary supplies, including hand sanitizer, soap and water, and practice hand hygiene frequently.
- Individuals from different households should practice physical distancing (two metres at all times) and wear face coverings except for eating, drinking, and sleeping.
- Hosts and guests should not sleep in the same bedroom and should use separate washrooms, if possible.
- Spend time together outdoors. Take a walk or sit outdoors, where possible, for interpersonal interactions.
- Avoid singing or shouting, especially indoors.
- Monitor for COVID-19 symptoms (hosts and guest).
- Have a plan for what to do if someone becomes ill, even with mild symptoms.

Celebrating the Winter Holidays...

Exchanging gifts

If you are exchanging gifts with people outside your household:

- Maintain physical distancing of two metres from anyone you do not live with when gifts are being exchanged.

- Wash your hands after handling or opening gifts.
- If permitted to meet indoors with people outside of your household wear a face covering. Also wear one outdoors if physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Stay home if you are feeling ill, even if you have mild symptoms, or if you are in quarantine or self-isolating.

Outdoor Holiday Activities (including decorating outdoors, sleigh rides, lighting ceremonies for menorahs, Christmas trees, outdoor markets, New Year's Eve parties, etc.)

Celebrating the holidays outdoors can be done safely and is likely safer than indoor activities.

If you choose to participate in outdoor holiday activities:

- Stay home if you are feeling ill, even if you have mild symptoms, or if you are in quarantine or self-isolating.
- Maintain physical distancing of two metres from anyone you do not live with. Do not congregate or gather with people who are not part of your household.
- Wear a face covering if physical distancing cannot be maintained, or if required.
- Avoid high-touch surfaces and wash your hands frequently and thoroughly or use hand sanitizer.

Any gathering or event where food or drink is served is required to comply with measures and other restrictions for food or drink establishments in accordance with [O. Reg. 82/20](#), [O. Reg. 263/20](#) or [O. Reg. 364/20](#). Local restrictions may also apply.

Parades

Any in-person parade would be subject to the gathering limits for organized public events in [O. Reg. 82/20](#), [O. Reg. 263/20](#) or [O. Reg. 364/20](#). Local restrictions may also apply.

Alternatively, organizers could consider drive-in and drive-through events, in accordance with the regulations.

Visiting with Santa, Mrs. Claus, Elves, etc.

Virtual visits are the safest way to see Santa this year.

If you do choose to see Santa in-person, it is likely safer to see him outdoors than indoors.

In either case:

- Stay home if you are feeling ill, even if you have mild symptoms, or if you are in quarantine or self-isolating.
- Maintain physical distancing of two metres from anyone you do not live with, including Santa, Mrs. Claus, elves, etc. ***even if a photo is being taken.***
 - Sitting on Santa's lap or having other close contact is not permitted.
- Wear a face covering indoors and outdoors, including when a photo is being taken. Santa's face covering should fit well over his beard.
- Do not congregate or linger. Line up two metres apart from members of other households if waiting.
- Avoid high-touch surfaces and wash your hands frequently and thoroughly or use hand sanitizer.

If you are planning on organizing an in-person event to meet with Santa, Mrs. Claus, or the elves, you are required to comply with all gathering limits, measures and other restrictions outlined in [O. Reg. 82/20](#), [O. Reg. 263/20](#) or [O. Reg. 364/20](#). Local restrictions may also apply. In **Grey (Lockdown)** Zones, indoor organized public events and social gatherings with people outside of your household are not permitted.

Workplace Celebrations

It is strongly recommended that workplaces **do not** have in-person workplace holiday gatherings or events, particularly if masks or face coverings must be removed to eat or drink. COVID-19 transmission and outbreaks have occurred at these types of events.

Virtual gatherings or events are the safest way to celebrate the holidays with co-workers.

If you choose to host or attend a workplace gathering or event:

- It is subject to gathering limits, measures and restrictions outlined in [O. Reg. 263/20](#) or [O. Reg. 364/20](#). Local restrictions may also apply. In **Grey (Lockdown)** Zones, indoor organized public events and social gatherings with people outside of your household are not permitted.
- You should follow the advice and guidance outlined in the [Hosting a Gathering](#) section above.

Other ways to celebrate the holiday season include:

- Encouraging kids to dress up and participate in virtual activities and parties.
- Watching holiday or other movies.
- Decorating doors, putting up lights, etc.
- Donating to your favourite charity or toy drive.
- Attending a drive-in or drive-through event.
- If you choose to volunteer this season, review and adhere to the precautions that will be in place to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

Check with your local municipality or public health unit for any additional advice or restrictions.

Having a Play Date or Sleepover...

- It is recommended that you only have close contact with the people you live with. In **Grey (Lockdown) Zones**, indoor organized public events and social gatherings with people outside of your household are not permitted.
 - Just because you know someone, it does not reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Keep following good public health practises.
 - Virtual visits are a safe option for your kids to see friends they don't live with.
- If you choose to have a play date with other children who are not a part of your household, it is safer to do it outdoors than indoors. In either case:
 - Children and adults should maintain physical distancing of two metres.
 - Play dates should be kept small and must adhere to the gathering limits (as per the zone your public health unit region is in).
 - Bring hand sanitizer and use it regularly.
 - Wear a face covering, even in places where they are not required.
 - Have each person or family bring their own food and drinks.
 - If food or drinks will be served, plan for how you will physically distance while distributing and cleaning up food, and not share utensils or other objects.
 - Wash your hands before and after eating.

- It is strongly recommended that kids should not have a sleepover with another child outside of their household, even if that child is in their class at school.