

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Information for Municipalities

What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and how does it spread?

COVID-19 is a respiratory infection caused by a newly identified virus. The infection has symptoms similar to other respiratory illnesses, including the flu and common cold: cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat and difficulty breathing. Severe illness can occur in some people. COVID-19 is transmitted by droplets when a person coughs or sneezes in close contact with another person, or onto surfaces which are later touched by another. The virus can be spread by touch if a person has used their hands to cover their mouth or nose when they cough. The virus causing COVID-19 is not known to become airborne, and does not pass through the skin.

MUNICIPAL EVENTS

Why are mass gatherings important in the context of COVID-19?

Large events such as conferences, festivals, concerts, religious services, and sporting events bring together groups of people and may increase transmission of respiratory infections. *Event organizers play an important role in minimizing the possibility of transmission for COVID-19, as well as other respiratory infections.*

Which events should be cancelled?

The Provincial Health Officer (PHO) has recommended that large gatherings over 50 people be cancelled. For gathering under 50 people, the final decision regarding postponement or cancellation of these gatherings is ultimately the responsibility of the organizer. Organizers should make provisions that allow event participants to maintain social distancing of two meters, as per the Provincial Health Officer.

Are children's events a concern for COVID-19?

Children have more frequent hand-to-face contact, and they generally have greater exposure to respiratory viruses than adults. However, current evidence suggests that children have lower rates of COVID-19 than adults, and are less likely to experience severe disease. Measures to limit infection transmission are always recommended for events including children.

How are limits on mass gatherings being enforced?

The PHO has issued an order allowing peace officers, including RCMP and municipal police agencies, to enforce limits on mass gatherings.

MUNICIPAL FACILITIES

Should playgrounds and outdoor spaces be closed?

Currently there is no official public health recommendation to close playgrounds, parks or similar outdoor spaces. Our PHO continues to encourage healthy individuals to practice social distancing and use precautions when visiting public spaces. It is up to individual discretion for citizens, including families with children, to determine if they are able to maintain the precautions below when visiting outdoor spaces:

- Gatherings of 50 people or more should not occur in public spaces, including beaches, parks and playgrounds
- Individuals enjoying outdoor spaces should maintain about 2 meters of distance from others
- Those touching surfaces in public places should wash their hands regularly, and refrain from touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
- Anyone who is experiencing new respiratory symptoms, including fever, cough, sneezing or sore throat should be isolating and thereby avoiding public outdoor spaces.

What about recreation facilities?

We encourage healthy people to engage in their usual activities, including recreational and leisure activities. We ask that individuals maintain physical distancing of two metres to prevent infection and transmission while engaging in their usual activities.

These common sense practices help prevent infection and transmission:

- Self-isolate if you experience any new respiratory symptoms such as cough, fever, sneezing.
- Regularly wash your hands with soap and water
- Avoid touching your face
- Practice social distancing – maintain a distance of 2 meters; no close greetings, including handshakes or hugs
- Anyone who is experiencing new respiratory symptoms, including fever, cough, sneezing or sore throat should be isolating and thereby avoiding public spaces, such as recreation facilities.

Measures facilities can take to prevent transmission include:

- Cleaning: Consider increasing routine cleaning practices – if you are cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces once a day, move to twice a day using the products you already use. Plan to frequently and thoroughly clean high-touch areas (such as door knobs, payment card touch pads and elevator buttons) with regular disinfectant cleaning products. Mixing 15 mL (1 tablespoon) of household bleach per 1 litre of water will form an effective disinfectant solution. Use of specialized disinfection products is not necessary.
- Space: Consider the density of spaces and people are able to put some distance – 2 metres – between one another. Stagger times for arrivals and departures to prevent crowding and congested areas.
- Hand hygiene: Ensure washrooms remain stocked with soap and consider offering hand sanitizer at entrances.
- Communication: Show customers, clients, members, and employees what you are doing to support the efforts to slow transmission of this virus by communicating online and at your place of business.
- Employees who feel unwell: Support employees to stay home if they are sick.

MUNICIPAL MEETINGS

What about municipal city and council meetings?

Risk assessment guidelines for gatherings suggest that if persons attending events have critical infrastructure roles or deliver essential services¹ alternative means, such as teleconference or virtual

¹ Essential Service Personnel are those considered critical to preserving life, health and basic societal functioning. <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID-19-Essential-service-workers-travel-determination.pdf>

meetings should be considered. For gatherings under 50 people, the decision regarding postponement or cancellation of these gatherings is the responsibility of the organizer. Organizers should make provisions that allow event participants to maintain social distancing of two meters, as per the Provincial Health Officer.

Meeting organizers should encourage and support regular attendees to:

- Stay home if they are ill.
 - *Encourage and support people who are ill in their decision to not attend the meeting/event.*
- Clean their hands frequently and adequately (with hand sanitizer or with warm running water and soap), especially after using the washroom and before interactions with others.
 - *Organizers can provide hand sanitizer and handwashing stations at entrances and in prominent locations at the venue.*
- Cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing (e.g. cough into their arm to avoid touching their face), and avoiding touching the face.
 - *Not all coughs are infectious. Allergies and other chronic, pre-existing conditions can cause symptoms. However, Reminders of good cough hygiene (“cover your cough”) can be provided in event communications including announcements and online messages*
- Avoid close proximity and contact with others
 - *Organizers can discourage physical contact and crowding (e.g. by encouraging people not to shake hands, not to dance closely together, etc).*
 - *Organizers should not provide or encourage shared sleeping accommodations.*
- Avoid sharing food or drinks with others.
 - *Organizers can eliminate self-serve buffet style eating, and instead offer separate individual servings (e.g. bagged lunches, separate serving plates).*

Should I provide masks to attendees?

Based on current public health evidence, it is **not** recommended that meeting participants without symptoms wear masks. Participants with compatible symptoms should not be attending events or meetings.

What about returning travelers?

All individuals returning from international travel are asked to self-isolate for 14 days following their return. This will apply to municipal staff. Self-isolation means not going to any public places, staying at home, and not having any visitors. To protect household members, do not share personal items like dishes, utensils, or towels, and wash your hands often. For more information on self-isolation of returning travelers go to: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing-isolation>

Are there special considerations for older adults (>65), people with lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, or immune-compromised individuals?

These are all risk factors for severe illness due to COVID-19, so it is particularly important to follow the above guidance. These people may be encouraged to attend meetings virtually when possible. Consider the distance and transportation options from your event to healthcare services, particularly for long events in remote locations.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

The Public Health Agency of Canada has developed a risk assessment tool to support event organizers in identifying and mitigating risks at large gatherings: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public->

[health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assessment.html](https://www.fraserhealth.ca/health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assessment.html).

Information developed by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) for the public on COVID-19, including how to isolate and seek medical attention for COVID-19, is available at [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-\(novel\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel)).

The Office of the Provincial Health Officer has provided pandemic preparedness documents including: “4 Key Ways Local Governments and Indigenous Communities Can Prepare For Novel Coronavirus COVID-19,” available at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/covid-19-4-key-ways-to-prepare.pdf>

WHO CAN I CONTACT?

The Community Health Specialist team is prepared to liaise with local governments on health and safety issues related to COVID. For questions related to community and local municipal response to COVID-related concerns, please connect with your local CHS.