

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR WARMING CENTRES – ROADMAP EXIT STEP

Last revised: March 1, 2022.

Cold weather is a serious public health concern as exposure to cold weather can cause a variety of health problems, including frostbite, hypothermia and death. Emergency warming centres are facilities used to provide short-term warmth and protection during cold weather events. However, they can result in the congregation of people who are at higher risk, such as older adults or those with respiratory illness, and potentially contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is currently at the Roadmap Exit Step of the province's [Roadmap to Reopen](#). This document provides guidance and clarity for emergency warming centres by following [Ontario Regulation 364/20: Rules for Areas at Step 3 and at the Roadmap Exit Step](#) (O. Reg. 364/20) under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Approach to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#).

Owners and operators of emergency warming centres are responsible for ensuring that their facility is following public health guidelines. As every emergency warming centre will be different, it is the responsibility of owners and operators to review their own policies and procedures, assess their facility and operations, and implement measures to reduce the risk of infection among staff, volunteers, and visitors.

This document provides guidance to reduce the risk of introducing and spreading COVID-19 in warming centres. It should be used in conjunction with existing warming centre operation and management plans, procedures, guidance, resources, and systems.

SAFETY PLAN

- A [safety plan](#) must be written and available on request. A copy of the safety plan must be posted in a conspicuous location where it can be viewed by staff and visitors.
- The safety plan shall describe the measures and procedures which have been implemented in the location to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19, including but not limited to, screening, physical distancing (where applicable), masks/face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects.
- Additional guidance on how to develop your plan can be found [here](#).

CAPACITY LIMITS

- To reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, it is recommended that the number of visitors and staff in the warming centre shall be limited to the number of members of the public that are able to maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person in the facility.
- It is recommended to post [maximum capacity posters](#) in locations where they can be clearly seen.
- It is important to note that the recommendation to maintain physical distancing will lower warming centre capacity, so consider setting up more warming centres than usual. More information about the recommendation to maintain physical distancing is provided in the next section.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- Physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) is recommended for all staff and visitors. Each warming centre may wish to determine its capacity for visitors with physical distancing recommendations in mind.
- Assign staff or volunteers to control entry and support screening, remind individuals of physical distancing recommendations in areas where people naturally gather to reduce crowding and bottlenecks, and monitor recommended capacity limits.
- It is recommended that individuals waiting in line or congregating outside the warming centre maintain physical distance of 2 metres (6 feet) from all others. Also, it is recommended to provide visible cues for people who may be waiting in line outside the facility by placing markers such as tape, safety cones, or painted lines every 2 metres (6 feet).
- It is recommended to design a walking flow for the whole facility and provide direction to visitors (e.g., one-way routes with signage and/or floor markings).

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- It is recommended to arrange chairs/seating areas a minimum of 2 metres (6 feet) apart and/or place signs in fixed seating spaces to promote physical distancing while creating spaces for households.

SCREENING AND RECORD KEEPING

- Visitors are to conduct a COVID-19 [self-assessment](#) before entering the warming centre. Please see the [instructions from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health](#) for direction on screening patrons.
- It is recommended that staff be [actively screened](#) before attending work each day. Staff are recommended to conduct a COVID-19 [self-assessment](#) before attending work and follow the direction provided.
- Post self-screening [signs](#) at all entrances to the warming centre in a location visible to the public that inform individuals on how to screen themselves for COVID-19 before entering.
 - See the section below for guidance if visitors have COVID-19 symptoms.
- It is recommended that operators of emergency warming centres record the name and contact information of all workers and volunteers who enter the warming centre (including first name and telephone number/email address). If feasible, also maintain a record of contact information for visitors.
- It is recommended that operator's maintain log records for at least one month and only disclose records to a medical officer of health or an inspector on request.

MANAGEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

- If a visitor screens positive or becomes unwell with COVID-19 symptoms at the warming centre, they must be promptly moved to a designated area, which should be separate and apart from the main warming area. Furthermore:
 - Where possible, anyone who is providing care to an ill visitor should maintain a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) and if 2 metres cannot be maintained wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) (i.e., medical mask and eye protection).
 - Explain to the visitor that they will be moved to an alternate space within the warming centre.
 - Advise the visitor to use [alcohol-based hand sanitizer](#) with 60-90% alcohol content and to wear a mask or face covering.
 - Encourage the visitor to visit a local [Assessment Centre](#) for testing, or if the visitor is unable to attend an Assessment Centre, arrange for testing to take place by calling the Infectious Diseases Team at 705-721-7520 ext. 8900.
- For medical emergencies, dial 911.
- Environmental [cleaning and disinfection](#) should be conducted after each use of the alternate room/space. More information on cleaning and disinfection is provided later in this document.

MASKS OR FACE COVERINGS

- Masks or [face coverings](#) must be worn at all times inside the emergency warming centre in a manner that covers the mouth, nose and chin unless exceptions apply as per [O. Reg. 364/20](#) or it is reasonably required to temporarily remove the mask/face covering for services provided.
- It is recommended that individuals wear a well-fitted high quality 3-layered non-medical mask, medical mask or respirator (i.e., N95s, KN95).
- Staff and volunteers are required to wear a medical mask and are recommended to wear approved eye protection when within 2 metres (6 feet) of someone who is not wearing a mask or face covering in a manner that covers that person's mouth, nose, and chin.
 - The appropriate use of PPE should be reviewed with staff and volunteers (e.g., medical masks and eye protection). This should include the proper [donning](#) (putting on) and [doffing](#) (taking off) of PPE.
- Post [signage](#) that promotes wearing a mask or face covering at entrances.

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HAND HYGIENE AND RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol content available at the entrances and exits.
- Encourage visitors to sneeze and cough into their elbow or use single-use tissues followed by hand hygiene.
- Post handwashing, hand sanitizing, and [Cover Your Cough](#) posters in locations where they can be clearly seen around the warming centre. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- In addition to routine cleaning and disinfection, surfaces that are frequently touched with hands should be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary condition, as well as when visibly dirty.
 - Examples of frequently touched surfaces include, but are not limited to hand contact areas, door handles, switches, tabletops, chairs, restrooms, and baby change tables.
- Use only disinfectants with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) given and approved by [Health Canada](#). Ensure products are not expired and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Limit the use of water fountains to be used only to re-fill water bottles, not for individuals to drink directly from them. Ensure they are cleaned and disinfected as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
- Equipment (e.g., seating mats, cots) must be cleaned and disinfected between use and as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
 - For equipment, use only cleaning and disinfectant products that are intended for the object.
 - Remove equipment that may be difficult to clean and disinfect.
- It is recommended to maintain logs of cleaning and disinfection.
- More guidance on cleaning and disinfection is provided by [Health Canada](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#).
- While the risk of COVID-19 transmission through touching surfaces is low, it does occur. It is important to continue to follow infection control measures to reduce the various ways in which COVID-19 is spread. This includes appropriate cleaning and disinfection as well as proper hand hygiene, masking, physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, and immunization.

SIGNAGE

Post signs promoting wearing masks/face coverings and handwashing/sanitizing. Make the signs visible to staff and patrons. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

Passive [screening signs](#) are required by law to be posted at all entrances to the facility in a conspicuous location visible to the public.

OTHER GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

Toronto Public Health. (2021). *COVID-19 Guidance: Emergency Warming Centres*. Retrieved from: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-reopening-recovery-rebuild/covid-19-reopening-guidelines-for-businesses-organizations/covid-19-guidance-emergency-warming-centres/>

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. (2021). *FAQ – Wearing masks or face coverings within enclosed public spaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/docs/default-source/COVID-/Reopen_Operate_Businesses/face-covering-indoor-spaces-FAQs-for-businesses-and-organizations.pdf?sfvrsn=68

Public Health Ontario. (2020). *IPAC Recommendations for Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19*. Retrieved from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/updated-ipac-measures-covid-19.pdf?la=en>

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Public Health Ontario. (2020). *Physical Distancing*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-covid-19-guide-physical-distancing.pdf?la=en>

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER AND OUR COMMUNITY

We understand that this is a challenging time, but public health measures like this are needed to limit the spread of COVID-19. We thank you for the service that you provide to the community.

Please contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's Health Connection line if you have any questions at 1-877-721-7520, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

While the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit aims to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to, nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional. No one should act, or refrain from acting, based solely upon the materials provided in this guidance, any hypertext links or other general information without first seeking appropriate legal or other professional advice. Please visit the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit website regularly for updates and additional guidance.