

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR OPERATORS OF PUBLIC BEACHES

Last revised: September 1, 2021

This guidance document provides recommendations for municipalities to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 at public beaches.

Public beaches include any public bathing area owned or operated by a municipality where the general public has access, and where there is reason to believe that there is recreational use of the water (e.g., beach signage, sectioned off swimming area, water safety/rescue equipment, lifeguard chairs, etc.).

Current research suggests the risk of transmission of COVID-19 from recreational waters is very low. However, COVID-19 is spread through respiratory droplets and aerosols when in close contact (less than 2 metres or 6 feet) with others. It is common to see people swimming and playing in the water in close proximity to one another. Therefore, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is greater if physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from people outside one's household is not maintained.

Please note, in addition to the guidance provided in this resource, municipalities must adhere to provincial emergency orders and the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Approach to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#) and associated regulations (including those related to gathering requirements) to determine if and how activities such as swim lessons or group sports can operate.

COMMUNICATE PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS BEFORE VISITORS COME TO THE BEACH

- Encourage visitors to use beaches close to their own communities when possible.
- Encourage visitors to conduct a COVID-19 [self assessment](#) before visiting the beach and follow the directions provided. If potential visitors have symptoms, they should stay home, seek testing and [self-isolate](#).
- Advise visitors of the current gathering restrictions under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#).
- Educate potential visitors about public health recommendations and local municipal restrictions using a variety of approaches, such as:
 - Social media posts, radio, television, and website content that can be shared by various users and partner agencies.
 - Public service announcements that local newspapers can publish.
 - Posting signage on roads leading to the beach area.
 - Posting self-screening signage at all entrances and ensure everyone self-screens before coming to the beach. Sample signage can be found [here](#).
 - Posting [Cover Your Cough](#) posters in visible locations as visitors arrive at the beach.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Municipalities should take measures to ensure that beach visitors who are not from the same household maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from other people at all times (i.e., while in the water and having fun on the shore). By maintaining physical distance, people are less likely to be exposed to COVID-19.

While on active duty and not responding to an emergency situation, lifeguards must maintain at least 2 metres (6 feet) distance at all times from patrons and other staff.

DEVELOP A BEACH PLAN TO MAINTAIN PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Public beach managers must have a plan and process for determining adequate spacing and square footage at the waterfront and beach. This plan should include a process for enforcement and crowd control. Managers should consider the application of their own physical distancing by-laws (where enacted) and response from local police services and by-law officers. Measures included within the plan can include but are not limited to:

- Dedicating a beach entrance and exit.
- Limiting the number of visitors to the beach to ensure physical distancing is maintained. This may include tracking the number of people on the beach and closing entrances to other visitors until people leave the beach before letting others in.

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- Posting signage to indicate how people can maintain a safe distance while at the beach.
- Using ground markings and barriers to manage traffic flow.
- Considering making paths one way.
- Considering adding grids or circles on the beach to indicate safe physical distancing. This will help individuals and groups judge distance more effectively.
- Reviewing parking to determine if physical distancing can be maintained in parking lots. If not, consider enhancing street parking or making some streets for pedestrian use only.

USE OF MASKS AND FACE COVERINGS

- Masks or [face coverings](#) are recommended in outdoor environments when physical distancing cannot be maintained. They can be removed when entering the water.
- Instructors are required to wear medical mask and 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 the person's mouth, nose and chin and not engaged with physical activity/respiration.
- Lifeguards stationed in lifeguard towers do not have to wear a mask or face covering if the tower provides a minimum 2 metre (6 foot) distance from patrons and other staff. If the lifeguard tower does not provide the requisite physical distancing of 2 metres, a mask or face covering should be worn. Once the lifeguard leaves the lifeguard tower, a mask or face covering should be worn.
- Post signs promoting the use of masks or face coverings outside public washrooms and any other public building located on-site. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

HAND HYGIENE AND RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

- Encourage all visitors to [wash](#) or [sanitize](#) their hands using alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol content as they arrive at the beach.
- Encourage visitors to bring alcohol-based hand sanitizer to be used during their beach visit.
- Encourage visitors to sneeze and cough into their elbow or use single-use tissues followed by hand hygiene. Post [Cover Your Cough](#) posters in locations where they can be clearly seen around the beach.
- Encourage visitors to avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Post handwashing and hand sanitizing posters in high traffic areas. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

WASTE DISPOSAL

- Provide a sufficient number of garbage receptacles for customers to dispose of used masks, disinfecting wipes, and other waste properly.
- Encourage visitors to take garbage and recyclables home with them.

RECREATIONAL AND SAFETY EQUIPMENT

- The ability to hire out equipment is dictated by the [Reopening Ontario Act](#) and associated regulations.
- Shared equipment (e.g., safety equipment, kickboards, pull buoys, or personal flotation devices (PFD)) 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. Ensure products have a Drug Identification Number (DIN) given and [approved by Health Canada](#). Ensure products are not expired and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- It is recommended to maintain logs of cleaning and disinfection.
- More guidance on cleaning and disinfection is provided by [Government of Canada](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#).

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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.

REFERENCES

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