

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR COOLING CENTRES – STEP 3

Last revised: September 1, 2021

Extreme heat is a serious public health concern. Exposure to [extreme heat](#) can have dangerous public health impacts including [heat illnesses](#) like heat stroke, exacerbating existing respiratory and cardiovascular conditions and can even lead to death. Cooling centres are facilities that provide relief and protection for the public during extreme heat events. However, they can result in the congregation of people who are at higher risk (e.g., older adults and/or those with respiratory diseases) and potentially contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Steps must be taken to reduce the risk of introducing and spreading COVID-19 in cooling centres.

This document provides guidance and clarity for operating cooling centres at Step 3 of the province's [Roadmap to Reopen](#), 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 \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#). This document should be used in conjunction with existing cooling centre operation and management plans, policies, procedures, guidance, resources, and systems.

All businesses and organizations in the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka must also adhere to the SMDHU's medical officer of health's [letter of instruction](#) (amended September 1, 2021).

Owners and operators of emergency cooling centres are responsible for ensuring that their facility complies with these public health guidelines and all emergency orders. As every emergency cooling centre will be different, owners and operators must 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.

PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19: PROTOCOLS AND POLICIES FOR COOLING CENTRES

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 must describe the implementation of public health measures in the organization or business, including but not limited to, screening, physical distancing, masks/face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, the wearing of personal protective equipment, and preventing and controlling crowding.
- Additional guidance on how to develop your safety plan can be found [here](#).

CAPACITY LIMITS

- To reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, the number of visitors and staff in the cooling shelter should be limited to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person.
- Post the capacity at the entrance. Sample signage is available on our [website](#).
- It is important to note that the requirement to maintain physical distancing will lower cooling centre capacity, so consider setting up additional cooling centres in your municipality if required.
- More information about the requirement to maintain physical distancing is provided later in this resource.

SCREENING AND RECORD KEEPING

- All staff, volunteers and visitors must be actively screened before entering the premises of the cooling centre.
- Staff and volunteers are to also conduct a COVID-19 [self-assessment](#) before attending work and follow the direction provided. If they have COVID-19 symptoms, they are to stay home, seek testing, and [self-isolate](#).
- The Province of Ontario has implemented a [website for all categories of screening](#).

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- If a visitor screens positive or becomes unwell with COVID-19 symptoms at the cooling centre:
 - Explain to the visitor that they will be moved to an alternate space, which should be separate and apart from the main cooling area.
 - Encourage the visitor to visit a local [assessment centre](#) for testing. 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.
- Maintain a record of contact information for staff, volunteers, and visitors to be provided to SMDHU to support case management and contact tracing if needed. Ensure that accurate and updated contact information for all staff and volunteers is maintained.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- Maintain [physical distancing](#) within the cooling centre of at least 2 metres (6 feet) between individuals. Each cooling centre should determine its capacity with physical distancing in mind.
- Assign staff or volunteers to remind of physical distancing measures in areas where people naturally gather.
- 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).
- Design a walking flow for the whole facility (e.g., one-way routes with signage and/or floor markings).
- Arrange chairs/seating areas a minimum of 2 metres (6 feet) apart and/or place signs in fixed seating spaces.
- Separate furniture to create spaces for households.

MASKS AND FACE COVERINGS

- Masks or [face coverings](#) must be worn at all times inside the cooling centre.
 - There are some situations when a mask or face covering is not required, as per [Ontario Regulation 364/20](#).
- Post signage that promotes wearing a mask or face covering at entrances. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

HAND HYGIENE AND RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

- Encourage proper [cough etiquette](#) and individuals to perform [hand hygiene](#) when entering and leaving the cooling centre.
- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol content available at the entrances and exits.
- Post handwashing and hand sanitizing [posters](#) in areas that can be clearly seen around the cooling centre.

DESIGNATE AN ALTERNATE ROOM/SPACE FOR PERSONS WHO DEVELOP COVID 19- SYMPTOMS

Where possible, the alternate room/space should have:

- A separate entrance and exit.
- A separate washroom.
- Partitions separating individuals that can be easily cleaned, in addition to other physical distancing measures.
- Dedicated staff/volunteers to work specifically in these areas.

The symptomatic visitor should be encouraged to wear a medical mask (if tolerated). Staff/volunteers dedicated to this space should maintain a distance of 2 metres (6 feet) and wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times (i.e., medical mask, eye protection). Time spent in these areas by staff/volunteers should be minimized.

Environmental [cleaning and disinfection](#) should be conducted after each use of the alternate room/space. More information on environmental cleaning is provided below.

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INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

The appropriate use of PPE (e.g., medical masks and eye protection) should be reviewed with staff and volunteers in the event a symptomatic individual requires cooling centre services. This should include the proper [donning](#) (putting on) and [doffing](#) (taking off) of PPE.

While the risk of COVID-19 transmission through touching surfaces is low, it does occur. It is important to continue to follow the bundle of infection control measures to reduce the various ways in which COVID-19 is spread. This includes proper hand hygiene, masking, physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, appropriate cleaning and disinfection, and immunization.

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, furniture, restrooms, taps, common rooms, 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.
- Remove furniture that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected.
- 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.
- Sample signage can be found [here](#). If water bottles are distributed at the cooling centre, discourage sharing of bottles. In addition, discourage the sharing of food.
- 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](#).

If a lack of potential cooling centre sites arises, emergency alternatives (e.g., parked air-conditioned buses) can be utilized. Communities may also partner with closed businesses, such as movie theatres, as alternative cooling sites.

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 appreciate all the efforts you are taking to help protect 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.

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