

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR RETAIL BUSINESSES AND SHOPPING MALLS – STEP 3

Last revised: February 17, 2022

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is currently at Step 3 of the province's [Roadmap to Reopen](#). This document provides guidance and clarity for all retail (businesses and indoor shopping malls) that are at Step 3 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](#) to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

NEW: Effective **February 17, 2022**, the total number of members of the public who are allowed to be in the indoor areas of the retail business at any one time is limited to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2 meters (6 feet) from every other person in the indoor area of the business.

The Ontario government requires **patrons** 12 years and 12 weeks of age and older to be [fully vaccinated against COVID-19](#) and provide proof of vaccination and proof of identity with an original identification document (photocopies of ID and digital versions (stored in phone) are generally not acceptable, but allowed for youth aged 12-17 years) to access certain businesses and organizations, with limited exemptions. More information can be found in [O. Reg. 364/20](#), in the province's [guidance for businesses and organizations](#) and [question and answer resource](#), on SMDHU's [website](#), and in the proof of vaccination and safety plan sections below.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL BUSINESSES IN THIS SECTOR

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Handing out coupons, samples, testers or flyers is not recommended.
- Maintain and enhance heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems [as recommended](#).

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 patrons. This requirement pertains to all businesses within a shopping mall and for the shopping mall itself.
- The safety plan shall describe the implementation of public health measures in the location, including but not limited to screening, proof of vaccination verification process (where applicable), physical distancing, masks/face coverings, capacity limits, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, the wearing of personal protective equipment, and preventing and controlling crowds.
- Additional guidance on how to develop a safety plan can be found [here](#).

CAPACITY LIMITS AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING

The owner/operator of each retail business, mall, shopping centre and personal care services business must post a sign in a conspicuous location visible to the public that states the [maximum capacity](#) they are permitted to operate based on the following:

- **NEW:** The total number of members of the public permitted in retail businesses and shopping malls at any one time must be limited to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person in the establishment.
 - Physical distancing capacity is determined by calculating the square metres of indoor areas accessible to the public and dividing by 4.
- **NEW:** The total number of members of the public who are permitted to be in the indoor areas of the indoor shopping mall at any one time must not exceed the total physical distancing capacity determined by totalling the number of members of the public who would be permitted to be in every business in the mall.
- Other settings which can be found in a shopping mall (e.g., restaurants, facilities for sports and recreation, theatres and cinemas) must adhere to the capacity limits they are permitted to operate under as per [O. Reg. 364/20](#).
- Members of the public who enter the shopping mall must not be permitted to loiter in any area of the shopping mall.

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- [Maximum capacity posters](#) must be posted in a conspicuous location where they can be clearly seen. This includes at each entrance of a shopping mall and at the entrance of each retailer operating within a shopping mall.

SCREENING

- All staff must be [actively screened](#) before attending work each day. Encourage staff to conduct a COVID-19 [self-assessment](#) before attending work and follow the direction provided.
- Advise patrons to conduct a COVID-19 [self-assessment](#) before attending the facility and follow the direction provided.
- [Self-screening signs must be](#) posted at all entrances of all business and shopping malls (including businesses within shopping malls) in a location visible to the public that informs individuals how to screen themselves for COVID-19 before entering.
- Certain businesses (e.g., personal care services) are required to [actively screen](#) patrons.
- Please see the provinces [website](#) for direction on screening employees/workers and patrons.
- More information on active screening is available in [O. Reg. 364/20](#), in SMDHU's guidance for [Safety Plan, Screening and Proof of Vaccination](#) document and on SMDHU's [website](#).

PROOF OF VACCINATION

- Operators of certain indoor businesses (e.g., restaurants, meeting and events spaces), specified in [O. Reg. 364/20](#) are required to check and verify proof of vaccination (via [enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code](#)) and proof of identity with an original identification document (photocopies of ID and digital versions (stored in phone) are generally not acceptable, but allowed for youth aged 12-17 years) of patrons 12 years and 12 weeks of age and older at the point of entry, with limited exemptions.
- Individuals are **required** to use a digital or printed paper copy of the [enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code](#) (vaccine receipts without QR code are no longer accepted) with limited exemptions for members of nine First Nations communities and visitors from outside of Canada. See the province's [proof of vaccination guidance](#) for more information.
- Operators are required to verify proof of vaccination by using the [Verify Ontario app](#) (visual verification is no longer accepted) in settings where proof of vaccination is in effect. Operators are advised not to accept physician notes as medical exemptions. Those with eligible medical exemptions will have access to an enhanced vaccination certificate with QR code that can be verified using the [Verify Ontario app](#).
- Certain businesses/facilities, specified in [O. Reg. 364/20](#) may elect to 'opt-in' (on a daily basis) to require proof of vaccination for all patrons 12 years and 12 weeks of age or older, at the point of entry, with limited exceptions. More information can be found in the opt-in requirements and details section below, [O. Reg. 364/20](#) and in the province's [proof of vaccination guidance](#) and on SMDHU's [website](#).

Opt-in requirements and details:

- Permitted businesses, specified in [O. Reg. 364/20](#), including but not limited to those listed below, may elect to opt-in (on a daily basis) to proof of vaccination requirements.
 - Businesses that provide personal care services,
 - Indoor recreational amenities,
 - Photography studios and services.
- **NEW:** Capacity limits are lifted for businesses eligible to opt-in pursuant to [O. Reg. 364/20](#).
- During each day when the election is in effect, the person responsible for the location:
 - Must check and verify proof of vaccination and proof of identity (with an original identification document (copies are not acceptable except for youth aged 12-17 years).
 - Is required to post [signs](#) at all entrances to the premise in a conspicuous location visible to the public that informs patrons that proof of vaccination is required.
 - Must ensure any capacity limits that the business or organization are permitted to operate under as per [O. Reg. 364/20](#) are followed.

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USE OF MASKS, FACE COVERINGS AND EYE PROTECTION

- Every person must wear a mask or [face covering](#) in a manner that covers their mouth, nose and chin unless exemptions apply as set out in [O. Reg. 364/20](#).
- Masks can only be removed indoors:
 - to eat and drink, while seated,
 - for health and safety reasons.
- It is recommended that all individuals wear a [well-fitted](#) high quality 3-layered non-medical mask, medical mask or respirator (i.e., N95s, KN95).
- Staff are required to wear a 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 that person's mouth, nose and chin.
- Post [signage](#) that promotes wearing a mask or face covering at entrances.

HAND HYGIENE

- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol content available at the entrances and exits.
- Encourage all patrons to [wash](#) their hands with soap and water or [sanitize](#) their hands using alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol content often, especially as they arrive at the retail business/shopping mall.
- Post handwashing and hand sanitizing posters in areas that can be clearly seen. Sample signage can be found [here](#).
- Encourage patrons to avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- Equipment, washrooms, locker rooms and change rooms must be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
- Dining tables are to be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary condition and between sittings.
- 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, sneeze guards, change rooms, pay stations, bagging areas, taps, credit card machines, baby change tables, and shopping carts/baskets.
- 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 soft/porous items that are difficult to clean and disinfect, such as upholstery, cushions and rugs. Items that cannot be easily sanitized should not be provided for use (e.g., cloth bags).
- Business hours may need to be adjusted to accommodate enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices.
- Encourage tap payment over PIN pad use.
- Discourage use of touch screens for wayfinding.
- 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.
- For personal care services specific cleaning and disinfection requirements and recommendations, visit SMDHU's [website](#).

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LINE-UPS (INDOORS AND OUTDOORS)

- The person responsible for a business or place that is open must not permit patrons to line up or congregate **outside** of the business or place, or at an outdoor attraction or feature within the business or place, unless they maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from other groups of persons. This includes patrons lining up outside a mall or waiting to enter a retail business or personal care service with an outside public entrance.
- The person responsible for a business or place that is open must not permit patrons to line up inside an **indoor** part of the business or place unless they are maintaining a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from other groups of persons **and** are wearing a mask or face covering in a manner that covers their mouth, nose and chin (unless entitled to any exemptions). This includes patrons lining up inside a mall to enter a business that is permitted to open in Step 3.

FURTHER REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SHOPPING MALLS

- **Indoor dining spaces** inside the shopping mall, including any tables and seating in food courts, as well as any restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments within a shopping mall are required to operate in accordance with [O. Reg. 364/20](#). For additional instruction and guidance regarding food premises and food service operation in Step 3, please see [SMDHU's COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Food Premises](#).
- Monitor entrances to control the number of people entering at any given time.
 - Restrict and/or direct the flow of people into, throughout, and exiting (e.g., designate some doors for entry or exit to avoid two-way traffic, designate some hallways for one-way traffic with signs and floor decals).
- Encourage patrons to exit as quickly as possible following completion of their shopping/transactions.
- Assign employees or security to assist with ensuring physical distancing in high-traffic areas.
- Remove or separate seating in shared spaces to at least 2 metres (6 feet) apart.
- Limit the number of people in washrooms to one at a time for washrooms where physical distancing is not possible. Close toilets or urinals that are less than 2 metres (6 feet) apart without barriers between them.
- Consider installing plexiglass or other physical barriers, in particular where physical distancing cannot be maintained or will be difficult, such as at information kiosks. To be effective, the barrier must be large enough to create a shield between people on either side.
- Consider ways to support populations at greater risk, such as dedicated hours.
- Offer online or telephone food and grocery orders with delivery or pick-up services as alternatives to shopping in person.
- It is recommended that music not be played at the shopping mall at a decibel level that exceeds the level at which normal conversation is possible.

SIGNAGE

Post signs at entry visible to staff and patrons regarding masks/face coverings, screening, handwashing, physical distancing, proof of vaccination (where applicable) and capacity limits. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

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

OTHER GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

Operators should also refer to guidance from the [Government of Ontario](#). The Government of Ontario guidance supplements, but does not replace, guidance from SMDHU about food safety, or the [Ontario Food Premises Regulations](#).

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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.