

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR PUBLIC BEACHES

This guidance document for municipalities provides recommendations to help stop the spread of COVID-19 while using public beaches.

Public beaches include any public bathing area owned/operated by a municipality to which 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.), which may result in waterborne illness or injury.

It is important for municipalities to adhere to provincial emergency orders and public health recommendations on gathering requirements or recommendations to determine how activities such as swim lessons or group sports, can be held.

COVID-19 TRANSMISSION FROM RECREATIONAL WATERS

Current research suggests the risk of transmission from recreational waters is very low. However, COVID-19 is spread through respiratory droplets when in close contact with others. It is common to see people swimming and playing in the water in close proximity of one another. Therefore, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is greater if physical distancing is not maintained.

COMMUNICATE PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS BEFORE VISITORS COME TO THE BEACH

- Encourage visitors to use beaches close to their own communities, when possible.
- Encourage visitors displaying [symptoms](#) (i.e. fever, cough, difficulty breathing, muscle aches, fatigue, headache, sore throat, runny nose) or who have come into contact with someone who has COVID-19 symptoms, to not visit the beach.
- Provide visitor education based on public health recommendations and local municipal restrictions. Communicate using a variety of approaches including:
 - Social media posts and website content that can be shared by a variety of users and partner agencies to get the information out to potential beach visitors.
 - 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.
 - Posting signs promoting the use of face coverings outside public washrooms and any other public building located on-site. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

MAINTAIN PHYSICAL DISTANCE

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

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. This can include:

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- Dedicating a beach entrance and exit.
- Posting signage to indicate how people can maintain a safe distance while at the beach.
- Use ground markings and barriers to manage traffic flow.
- Consider making paths one way.
- Consider adding grids or circles on the beach to indicate safe physical distancing. This will help individuals and families judge distance more effectively.
- Review 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.
- Limit 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.
- Encourage visitors use alternative beaches if beaches are crowded in consultation with other municipalities.

PROMOTE HAND HYGIENE

- Encourage all visitors to wash or sanitize their hands as they arrive at the beach.
- Encourage visitors to bring alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol-based) supplies to sanitize their hands and disinfectant wipes to be used during their beach visit.
- Post handwashing and hand sanitizing posters in high traffic areas. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

Support proper hand hygiene

- Post signage on handwashing and hand sanitizing at sinks. Sample signage can be found [here](#).
- Ensure that soap and paper towels are always available and are refilled frequently.
- Paper towels are preferred in public washrooms during COVID-19. Though no studies have pointed to COVID-19 being transmitted through electric air dryers, some studies show that air dryers can spread bacteria.
- Hands-free sinks and paper towel dispensers are preferred to avoid the use of handles which reduces high touch surfaces in washrooms. If hands-free appliances cannot be installed, more frequent cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces is required.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol-based) should be made available where possible at the entrance/exit of the washroom.

PUBLIC WASHROOMS

Please see [Public Health Guidance for Use of Public Washrooms](#) for important information about requirements for face coverings, as well as other safety and cleaning precautions.

PLAYGROUNDS

As of Friday, July 17, 2020, outdoor playgrounds and play structures are permitted to reopen under Stage 3 of the provincial reopening plan. Physical distancing of at least 2 metres must be in place at all playgrounds and play structures, except between individuals from the same household or social circle. The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) recommends that owners/operators of playgrounds and play structures determine a reasonable capacity for each location based on a 2 metre radius per person within the play area and include the maximum number of participants on a sign in order to assist in ensuring that physical distancing is maintained. Furthermore, SMDHU recommends that signage be provided at playgrounds and play structures to assist with educating caregivers and children about physical distancing and hand hygiene. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

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Caregivers are encouraged to provide children who use playgrounds and play structures with hand sanitizer where proper handwashing facilities are not available. Where handwashing facilities are available near playgrounds and play structures, caregivers and parents are encouraged to practice handwashing frequently.

WASTE DISPOSAL

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

PET SAFETY

If dogs are allowed on the beach, they should be on leash and at least 2 metres away from other people and animals.

RECREATIONAL AND SAFETY EQUIPMENT

- It is a decision for beach managers whether or not they hire out equipment.
- If sharing safety equipment, kickboards, pull buoys, or personal flotation devices (PFD), [disinfect](#) between each use.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Employers must have written measures and procedures for staff safety, including for infection prevention and control. Detailed guidelines for COVID-19 are available on the [Ministry of Health's COVID-19](#) and [Province of Ontario](#) websites.
- If a staff member working at the beach is diagnosed with COVID-19, the staff member must remain off work for 14 days following symptom onset and must receive clearance from the local public health unit before returning to work.
- If a staff member is a close contact of an individual diagnosed with COVID-19, the staff member must remain off work for 14 days from last exposure.
- The staff member should consult with the local public health unit to determine when they can return to work. Staff members should also report to their Employee Health/Occupational Health and Safety Department prior to returning to work.

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

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REFERENCES

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