

## Enhanced Public Health Measures to Address Food Safety Risks at Special Events

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**To:** Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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**Prepared By:** Paul Medeiros, MSc, CPHI(C)  
Manager, Environmental Health

**Approved By:** Christopher Beveridge,  
Director of Health Protection

**Submitted By & Signature:** *Original signed document on file.*

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**Dr. Nicola J. Mercer, MD, MBA, MPH, FRCPC**  
**Medical Officer of Health & CEO**

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## Recommendations

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It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. Receive this report for information.

## Key Points

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- The number of special events held in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) decreased dramatically during COVID-19 restrictions. This year will see a resurgence of special events, many of which will include the sale and consumption of food.
- Special events pose an increased risk this year due to a combination of factors such as new and out of practice vendors who may need food safety reminders.
- To reduce food safety risk and promote public health at special events, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) is undertaking enhanced measures to support special event organizers and vendors this year.

# Discussion

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## What is a special event?

Special events are an important part of a community's quality of life and serve as providers of affordable & accessible entertainment to its citizens. A "special event" is a broad range of activities planned to mark special occasions or to achieve specific social, cultural or economic objectives. The term "special event" is applied to civic, provincial, or national celebrations, cultural celebrations or gatherings, sports contests, and a wide range of commercial or corporate functions. <sup>1</sup>

## What is Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health's role with special events?

The role of WDGPH is to prevent or reduce the burden of food borne illness associated with special events. This is accomplished through a risk-based approach that includes elements of communication, education and on-site inspections.

## How does the food safety risk at special events differ from previous years?

Following two years of COVID-19 related restrictions (see table below), this year will see a resurgence of special events, many of which will include the production and sale of food. The number of special events is anticipated to increase to above 100 this year as 48 special events have already been held or registered so far in 2022.

Special events have been separated into two classes (Class A and Class B) based on risk, size, and frequency. Class A special events, being the greater risk, will receive an on-site inspection and occur annually. Class B special events undergo a formal risk-assessment and only those of events deemed high-risk are inspected.

The number of large special events held in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph decreased during the past two years due to COVID-19 restrictions.

- 2018: Class A events: 9. Class B events: 103
- 2019: Class A events: 13. Class B events: 84
- 2020: Class A events: 0. Class B events: 29
- 2021: Class A events: 1. Class B events: 48
- 2022: Class A events: 0. Class B events: 48

WDGPH has enjoyed a history of safe and successful special events. There is an increased risk of a food safety adverse event at special events this year primarily due to

a combination of factors such as new & inexperienced vendors, and vendors and special event organizers who have been out of practice and may have forgotten important food safety practices and requirements.

### What is the potential impact related to the increased food safety risk?

Both public health and public confidence could be shaken because of adverse food safety events this year. Outbreaks early in the season could reduce the willingness of residents to attend future special events and could have a negative impact on tourism. Food borne illness outbreaks would place undue burden on the health care system and local economy.

### What enhanced public health measures will be taken to reduce food safety risk?

To reduce food safety risk and to promote public health at special events, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health is undertaking enhanced support measures this year. These efforts will result in:

- Reduced food safety risks and improved public health oversight
- Improved consumer and community confidence in special event food service
- Improved communications and relationships with special event organizers and food vendors
- Increased public awareness of the role public health in the community
- Ripple effect of improved food safety as special event food vendors take the lessons learned and apply to their places of business or home.

### Specific public health measures:

#### May (Prior to primary special event season):

- Reminder communication to be sent to all previously inspected (in last five years) special event organizers to highlight specific food safety risks and to survey if those organizers plan to operate their special event this year.
- Pending interest, live webinars and food handler exams will be offered where requested by the organizers and vendors of special events in the summer. Focus of the webinars will be on safe food handling at special events and will include a Q&A session. Pre-post surveys will be conducted to assess changes in food safety knowledge for organizers and vendors. Webinars will be recorded and will be made available for future reference.
- Information kits sent to special event organizers operating this year, and to local municipal offices who receive applications for special event approval.

- WDGPH website to reflect enhanced special event program offering.
- Student Public Health Inspectors will be trained to supplement existing PHI team.
- Availability of PHIs for consultation with organizers and vendors, including the availability of PHIs to attend planning meetings for larger events.
- Enhanced training to WDGPH Call Center operators to handle incoming complaints that may be related to Special Events.

### June - Special Event Start Up

- Thermometer give-aways: Each WDGPH office will be provided with probe thermometers (to check the internal temperature of food) which will be given to vendors in special events that provide high-risk foods (also called potentially hazardous foods). These foods have ideal conditions for bacterial growth and are more likely to harbour dangerous bacteria and other disease-causing pathogens. Examples include meat, poultry, sea food, dairy products, eggs etc.

### Late-June - September:

- Inspection results from the first few inspected events will be analysed to identify any trends as well as best practices observed. Findings will be shared with special event organizers of upcoming events.
- Bi-weekly internal discussion among PHIs on Special Events to discuss i.e., what's working, what are they seeing, how can they support others.

### Autumn:

- A survey will be conducted of special event organizers and city stakeholders to gauge the effectiveness of the enhanced program and to identify improvements.

## Conclusion

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The WDGPH Environmental Health Inspection team will work with community stakeholders in this undertaking of providing enhanced support, education, inspection, and training at special events in its jurisdiction. This will help decrease the risk of potential food borne outbreaks and reduce the burden of illness in the community. Further, this will protect consumer confidence thereby supporting local economic recovery. These actions will also enhance the trust of the community in food safety programs provided by WDGPH.

# Ontario Public Health Standard

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## Food Safety

To prevent or reduce the burden of food-borne illnesses.

“The board of health shall: c) Respond by adapting programs and services in accordance with the Food Safety Protocol, 2018 (or as current); the Operational Approaches for Food Safety Guideline, 2018 (or as current); and the Population Health Assessment and Surveillance Protocol, 2018 (or as current).”

“The board of health shall ensure food handlers in food premises have access to training in safe food-handling practices and principles in accordance with the Food Safety Protocol, 2018 (or as current) and the Operational Approaches for Food Safety Guideline, 2018 (or as current).”

## 2020 WDGPH Strategic Direction(s)

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**Service Delivery:** We will provide our programs and services in a flexible, modern and accessible manner, and will ensure they reflect the immediate needs of our Clients and our role in the broader sector.

**System Transformation:** We will equip the Agency for change in all aspects of our work so that we are ready for transformational system change when the time comes.

**Knowledge Transfer:** We will ensure that our decision-making and policy development efforts are informed by meaningful health data at all times.

## Health Equity

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- Special events provide a lower-cost summer entertainment/activity alternative.
- Vendors and organizers who may be facing financial challenges due to COVID-19 and may not be able to pay for the food handlers training will be offered free of charge, the food handlers' challenge exam.
- For members of public with language barriers, WDGPH can offer the food safety exam onsite at special events in 19 different languages.
- Increase awareness and knowledge of vendors and organizers in food safety.

## References

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1. City of Guelph. “Special event” definition sourced from The City of Guelph:  
<https://guelph.ca/wp-content/uploads/SpecialEventUserGuide2.pdf>)

## Appendices

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N/A.