

COVID-19 Guidance for Community Gardens

Issued: May 1, 2020

On April 25, 2020 the government of Ontario lifted restrictions, allowing allotment gardens and community gardens to operate following the guidance of local public health authorities.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to garden coordinators and garden managers regarding the safe use of community gardens to prevent transmission of COVID-19. Due to the diversity of gardens (e.g., size, governance, etc.) some of these suggestions will need to be modified to work in each garden. **Only gardens with the capacity to follow these guidelines are permitted to operate.**

Entrance Restrictions and Requirements:

- Prohibit access to individuals experiencing any of the following:
 - Symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., a new or worsening cough, fever, difficulty breathing, nasal congestion, chest tightness, muscle aches, chills, fatigue, loss of smell or taste, sore throat, headaches, digestive issues, etc.).
 - Close contact with a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case.
 - Travel outside of Canada in the past 14 days.
 - Instructions from local public health authorities to self-isolate due to travel or contact history.
- Restrict access to registered members, staff and volunteers.
- Non-members, visitors, guests and pets (unless service animals) should not be permitted to enter.
- Advise anyone who is more vulnerable (i.e., individuals over the age of 65, with a compromised immune system, or with underlying medical conditions) to avoid gardens and instead send a person who is in good health or explore other options (e.g., online grocery shopping, delivery options, etc.).
- Children should only be brought to garden on an as-needed basis and should be instructed to follow physical distancing and hand hygiene requirements.
- Anyone displaying symptoms should be given public health contact information and asked to leave.
- **Gardens are to solely be used for essential food production and not social gatherings.** Permit access to plant, maintain and harvest food only. Prohibit events such as flower festivals, children's events, programming, training, group builds, potlucks, etc.
- Keep trips and time spent at gardens to a minimum. Encourage members to plan ahead and use gardening techniques that will reduce labour.

- Display [sign for appropriate users](#) and [screening signage](#).

Membership Tracking:

- Update the list of current registered members, staff and volunteers and track those who have agreed to abide by COVID-19 safety measures, acknowledging that access to the garden can be revoked if they do not follow guidelines.
- Consider using a sign-in and sign-out system or schedule to track who is in the garden each day. Explore online scheduling options such as Google Calendars. This may assist with communication, close-contact tracing if required, etc.

Physical Distancing Requirements:

- Maintain a distance of at least 2 metres or 6 feet from other people (unless gardening with members of the same household). For some gardens, this may mean limiting the number of people in the garden at one time or creating a schedule.
 - Limit the number of gardeners allowed in the space to ensure physical distancing can be maintained. Ensure all gardeners know the maximum number of people allowed.
 - If scheduling garden visits, consider the space between plots and stagger accordingly to maximize the space between gardeners at the time of use and ensure physical distancing of 2 metres can be maintained. As a scheduling example, number plots and ask odd/even numbered plots to come on different days.
- Close and/or block off all non-essential amenities such as picnic tables and benches to avoid social gathering.
- Display [physical distancing signage](#) and physical reminders of what 2 metres looks like.

Sharing Equipment and Tools:

- Remove shared tools and gloves and encourage gardeners to bring their own.
- If removing shared tools is not an option, consider assigning each person tools.
 - When using shared tools, ask gardeners to wear gloves or to wash their hands/use hand sanitizer before and after using the tools.
- If gardeners use gloves, each gardener must supply their own pair of gloves and not share them. Instruct individuals who use gardening gloves to launder them after each use.
- Provide instructions regarding how to safely share garden materials and equipment, including instructions on cleaning and disinfection. Display [equipment use signage](#).

Infection Control Requirements

Hand Hygiene

- If possible, provide handwashing stations in the gardens, with signage. If hands are visibly soiled, handwashing with soap and water is preferred.
- If the handwashing station is in a bathroom, the bathroom needs to be equipped with water under pressure, liquid hand soap, and paper towels.
- If handwashing with soap and water is not available, hands must be wiped clean **before** applying alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Encourage gardeners to bring hand sanitizer (at least 70% alcohol) with them to the garden.
- Perform hand hygiene: 1) Before entering the garden; 2) Before and after using shared tools and; 3) Upon leaving the garden.
- Latex gloves do not replace proper hand sanitation practices.
- Display [hand hygiene signage](#) and [posters](#).

Cleaning and Disinfection

- [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces which are most likely to be contaminated, such as hoses, water spigots, door/gate handles, tools, shared equipment, handwashing taps, etc.
 - At minimum, frequently touched surfaces and items should be cleaned and disinfected by users upon arrival and before leaving the garden.
 - If gardens have specific hours of operation, frequently touched surfaces and items should be cleaned and disinfected before opening and closing the garden.
 - Remove all dirt and organic matter before sanitizing items.
 - Follow manufacturer's instructions when cleaning tools.
- Garden coordinators are encouraged to develop a system that works for their garden to minimize touching of shared surfaces.
 - For example, consider leaving the gate open during hours of operation so individuals do not have to touch the gate to enter (if applicable).
 - For example, consider having dedicated staff or volunteers open and close shed or bin doors for garden members (if applicable).
- To keep up with site work, garden coordinators may wish to have a scheduled member rotation to perform site maintenance duties and clean equipment.
- If applicable, bathrooms are required to be cleaned at least twice daily (or more frequently as needed).

Use of non-medical (homemade) masks

- [Wearing a non-medical mask](#) (like a homemade cloth mask) or facial covering is an additional measure you can use to protect others from you, especially in situations where physical distancing is difficult.
- Wearing a homemade mask may help prevent people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others.
- If registered members, staff or volunteers choose to wear a mask ensure they are aware of [how to safely wear a mask](#).

Communication Requirements & Signage

- Based on this guidance document, develop COVID-19 policies/protocols that are specific to the community gardens you manage.
- It is the responsibility of each garden coordinator or garden manager to ensure that all policies, protocols and guidelines are communicated to registered members, staff and volunteers.
- Use communication methods that work to reach your gardeners to inform them about the new measures – email, phone, social media sites, bulletin boards, posters. Use peer-to-peer translation when translated materials are not sufficient.
- [Place clear, visible signage](#) at all garden entrance(s) and throughout the garden (especially in locations where shared equipment/tools are held) to remind registered members, staff and volunteers about safe gardening practices.
- Due to the severity of the circumstances, revoke access of any member not following the rules set out for garden safety.

Equity and Gardens

- The COVID-19 crisis can amplify existing inequities. Equity-seeking groups (such as Indigenous, people of colour, people with low incomes, LGBTQ2S+ people, people with disabilities and newcomers) have traditionally faced greater barriers in accessing growing space to begin with based on the first-come-first-served system used by many community gardens.
- Community gardens should seek ways to prioritize garden space access for people who are facing specific barriers to food and income access, whenever possible.
- With limited garden space available for the season, gardens can prioritize access for those who will potentially have the most benefit. For example:
 - Gardens can maintain a separate, prioritized wait list for people facing barriers to food access.
 - Offer volunteer and leadership roles to people from equity-seeking groups.
 - Consider growing food to donate to community food programs.

Food Safety:

- Encourage gardeners to [wash their produce before consumption](#).
- Clean fruits and vegetables by scrubbing them under running water – even if you do not plan to eat the peel or skin. Any contamination on the peel can get inside fruits and vegetables when they are cut or peeled.
 - Lysol wipes are not good to use on foods because the chemicals in the wipes should not be ingested.
- [Clean and disinfect counters and other surfaces](#) you may have touched or used while putting produce away.
- If bringing reusable bags, wash reusable bags after each trip to the garden.

Questions?

For more information or additional support:

- Visit www.wdgppublichealth.ca/covid-19
- Call the WDGPH COVID-19 Call Centre at 519-822-2715 ext. 7006 for health-related inquiries or ext. 4020 for non-health related inquiries.
- If applicable, contact your corresponding WDGPH COVID-19 Liaison

Adapted from KFL&A Public Health, Hastings Prince Edward Health Unit and COVID-19 Best Practices for Community Gardens in Toronto [document](#).

COVID-19 Signage for Community Gardens

This document provides signage for community gardens to use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below is the title of each resource with a purpose and suggested use.

General sign to restrict access to appropriate users

Purpose: To ensure only allowed persons enter the garden (i.e., registered users, healthy, no travel history, no close contact with COVID-positive persons).

Suggested use: Post at garden entrance(s). Display alongside [screening signage](#).

Hand hygiene signage

Purpose: To remind garden users to practice good hand hygiene.

Suggested use: Post at garden entrance, at handwashing stations and where shared equipment is stored. Display alongside [hand hygiene posters](#).

Physical distancing signage

Purpose: To remind garden users to keep 2 metres or 6 feet apart from other people (unless gardening with members from the same household).

Suggested use: Post at garden entrance, at handwashing stations and where shared equipment is stored.

Cleaning and disinfecting signage

Purpose: To remind garden users to follow instructions on cleaning and disinfecting garden equipment (group/individual that manages the garden is responsible for creating these instructions and ensuring users have received and understand instructions).

Suggested use: Post where any shared equipment is stored.

Other resources that may be useful:

Poster: [Physical distancing](#) (Public Health Ontario)

Factsheet: [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#) (Public Health Ontario)

Information Sheet: [Food and Shopping Tips](#) (Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health)

Help prevent COVID-19 and other illnesses

Community Garden Users

Gardens are to be used for essential food production and not social gatherings.

You are welcome here if you:

- Are a **registered** member, staff or volunteer AND
- Have **no** signs or symptoms of illness* AND
- Have **not** travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days AND
- Have **not** been in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19

Non-members and pets (unless service animals) are not permitted to enter. Garden members have been trained in COVID-19 safety protocols and agree to abide by them.

Children should only be brought to garden on an as-needed basis and must follow physical distancing and hand hygiene rules.

*If you are ill, visit this website to assess your symptoms: [covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/](https://www.covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/)

Help prevent COVID-19 and other illnesses

Keeping your hands clean

- **Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer:**
 - Before entering and upon leaving the garden
 - Before and after using shared equipment or tools
- If hands are visibly soiled, hands must be wiped clean (with regular wipes, not disinfecting wipes) **before** applying alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Gloves are not a substitute for handwashing.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth, eyes or face.
- Cough or sneeze into the bend of your elbow or a tissue.
- When you return home, immediately wash your hands with soap and water.

Help prevent COVID-19 and other illnesses

Physical distancing

Keep a 2-meter (6 feet) space between yourself and others (unless gardening with members from the same household).

Please keep your social distance



- Social distancing means keeping 2 metres apart from others

Help prevent COVID-19 and other illnesses

Keeping equipment clean

Read and follow instructions for cleaning and disinfecting gardening equipment and tools.

Shared tools and equipment must be cleaned and disinfected **before and after** each use.