

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Parks and Green Spaces

COVID-19: Public Health Guidance for Parks and Green Spaces

September 21, 2020 Version 2.0

Key Points

- As of September 19, 2020, gatherings of 25 people outdoors are permitted, as long as physical distancing is maintained.
 - Outdoor playgrounds and play structures are permitted to open.
 - Events such as weddings, movies or yoga in the park can be permitted with up to 25 people if physical distancing is maintained.
 - Clean and disinfect public washrooms as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary environment, with extra cleaning/disinfection prior to and following large gatherings.
 - Make hand sanitizer stations available if possible, particularly during public gatherings (i.e. movies, weddings).
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Preamble

Research shows the availability of parks and green spaces contributes to community health by providing environments that encourage and facilitate both physical health and mental wellbeing. [Access to affordable recreation](#) has been identified as one of many priorities to improve the quality of life for everyone in Elgin-St. Thomas and Oxford County (see the full report on access to recreation in the [community reports](#) section). Today, the need for affordable recreation and access to green space has been exacerbated by the social and economic challenges many citizens have experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By providing an opportunity for recreation and physical activity, municipalities can enable people of all ages to remain resilient, healthy and improve their quality of life during a challenging and unprecedented time. It is important to recognize the benefits of parks and green spaces while mitigating the risks of transmitting COVID-19 to ensure public health and safety. The following recommendations are provided to keep the community safe and healthy while preventing community transmission of COVID-19 within the Southwestern Public Health region.

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New Gathering Limits

Gatherings have the potential to result in the spread of COVID-19 if they are not planned and managed carefully. Effective Saturday, September 19, 2020, the Ontario government lowered the limits on unmonitored and private social gatherings across the province. The new limits are:

- 10 people at an indoor event or gathering (the previous limit was 50)
- 25 people at an outdoor event or gathering (the previous limit was 100)

The lowered limits apply to all unmonitored and private social gatherings such as functions, parties, dinners, gatherings, BBQs and wedding receptions held in private residences, backyards, parks and other recreational areas. As was the case with the previous limits, indoor and outdoor gatherings cannot be combined. Gatherings of 35 people in total (25 outdoors and 10 indoors) are also not permitted. All gatherings are subject to requirements for physical distancing of two meters for all people who are not from the same household or social circle.

Provincial Stage 3 Reopening Plan

Outdoor playgrounds and play structures are permitted to open in Stage 3 of the provincial reopening plan, which takes effect on Friday, July 17th, for the Southwestern Public Health region. The reopening of outdoor playgrounds will contribute to affordable recreation for children and families in our region.

Emergency Orders

Please be aware of provincial emergency orders that remain in effect to know what is permitted. These orders may change, so it is important to keep up to date on changes made by the Province of Ontario. Current orders affecting parks and green spaces include:

Organized public events and certain gatherings

- As of **Saturday, September 19th**, municipalities within the Southwestern Public Health region may permit outdoor gatherings with a maximum of 25 people as long as physical distancing of two meters can be maintained between people from separate households or social circles.
- With the increase to outdoor gathering size, a wedding, funeral or religious service, rite or ceremony can be permitted in a park or green space with up to 25 people. The

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person(s) conducting the ceremony or service is responsible for ensuring compliance with this limit. All attendees must comply with physical distancing by remaining at least two meters apart from other attendees unless they are members of the same household or social circle.

- Movies in the park can be permitted with up to 25 people provided that physical distancing of two meters is maintained between people from different households or **social circles**. Consider encouraging individuals to bring an outdoor blanket or chairs to use while watching the movie and remain in their personal space or bubble during the movie.
- Yoga in the park can be permitted as long as the group (instructor(s) and participants) does not exceed 25 people, and as long as physical distancing of at least two meters can be maintained between participants from separate households or social circles. Participants should be responsible for bringing their equipment (such as a yoga mat, towel, water bottle, sunscreen, etc.) and not share their items with others.

Cleaning and Disinfection of Public Washrooms

Please follow our guidelines for the **cleaning and disinfection of public washrooms**. Any public washroom open and available to gathering attendees are to be cleaned and disinfected “as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary environment.” Southwestern Public Health recommends cleaning and disinfecting prior to and following the service or ceremony as the frequency of use increases with such gatherings.

Remember to follow the **public health principles for public spaces** as they pertain to parks and green spaces. This includes requirements for physical distancing and hand hygiene. Where physical distancing of two meters is not possible or a significant challenge, the use of **non-medical masks or face coverings** are recommended.

Hand Hygiene

Consider posting information about proper **hand hygiene** and ensure that in addition to cleaning and disinfecting public washrooms, **hand sanitizer** stations are made available, particularly during public gatherings such as movies in the park. Alternatively, encourage park users to bring their hand sanitizer if the washroom is unavailable for use, or the hand soap/sanitizer is depleted.

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Additional Resources

The Public Services Health and Safety Association has issued guidance for [parks and recreation workers](#) and parks and recreation [employers](#).

[COVID-19 and Outdoor Safety](#): Considerations for the use of outdoor recreational spaces. *National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health*, April 17, 2020.

Parks and Recreation: A True Health Solution Infographic. *National Parks and Recreation Association*, July 2017.