

Public Health Guidance on Indoor and Outdoor Gatherings

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Alberta has established public health orders, under the *Public Health Act*, which includes restricting gatherings/events of different purposes and sizes in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Event planners and community leadership can determine, in collaboration with local health officials, how to implement the guidance found within this document, making adjustments to meet the unique needs and circumstances of the community.

How is COVID-19 Spread?

COVID-19 is spread through tiny droplets of liquid produced by people who have the virus.

These droplets spread by:

- coughing, sneezing, talking, laughing, shouting and singing
- touching objects or surfaces (bath towels, kitchen utensils, door knobs, etc.) the virus has landed on and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- contact with infected saliva when sharing objects, instruments or utensils with others

People who have COVID-19 can spread it to others **before** they start to feel or look sick.

COVID-19 is not airborne, which means that it doesn't stay in the air long and won't go very far. But if you are too close to someone with COVID-19 you can get sick by breathing in air that contains droplets with the virus.

Gatherings

A gathering is any event or assembly that brings people together in the same space at the same time.

Examples of indoor and outdoor gatherings include, but are not limited to:

- family events: celebrations, weddings, funerals
- community events: cultural events, awareness events
- business and education: meetings, seminars

Gatherings can contribute to the spread of COVID-19 within a community by bringing together individuals who are not regular household contacts, and via travelers who attend these events and introduce the virus to new communities. COVID-19 can spread rapidly from even a relatively small gathering of people as has been seen in numerous outbreaks. The larger the gathering the more opportunity exists for person-to-person interactions and therefore greater risk of COVID-19 transmission.

It is **essential that public health directives regarding gatherings and physical distancing continue to be followed** during relaunch to keep everyone, especially Elders and people with pre-existing medical conditions, safe. All gatherings must allow for physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from each other for individuals from different households or cohort groups.

It is important to remember that while public health measures can reduce the risk of COVID-19 infections, they cannot completely eliminate the threat.



Higher Risk Activities in Gatherings

Activities or practices that increase the risk of COVID-19 through contact (touching surfaces) or droplet transmission (sneezing, coughing, singing, cheering, and shouting) should be avoided or modified to lower the risk. Avoid higher risk activities in gatherings such as:

- direct physical contact or touch with people outside of your household
- close-range conversations
- singing, cheering, and shouting
- sharing equipment/items/objects
- sharing food, drinks or utensils

Reducing risk in gatherings

There are a number of measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission when in gatherings. Considerations include the following:

- **Cancel, postpone, or explore alternative methods of attendance**, especially for people at greater risk, such as people age 60 years or older, and those with chronic medical conditions.
 - Examples of alternative attendance include virtual, drive in, or separate/staggered times for people at greater risk.
 - When planning a gathering consult with local public health officials (e.g. Health Centre staff, local Environmental Public Health Officer) to understand the COVID-19 activity in your area/areas where attendees will be traveling from, as well as for further information on public health measures for gatherings.
 - Refer to the Alberta Health COVID-19 status map to view the level of risk in regions and information about local health measures. It also shows the rate of COVID-19 cases and the number of active cases.
<https://www.alberta.ca/maps/covid-19-status-map.htm>
 - If attendees are anticipated to travel from other communities, particularly if they are outside of Alberta, be aware of travel restrictions as well as COVID-19 activity in the area they are coming from. Information on travel restrictions can be found on the Alberta Health website at <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-travel-advice.aspx> . Other provincial COVID-19 websites can be visited for information on COVID-19 activity within the respective province.
- **Be aware of and follow public health restrictions around gatherings.**
 - Details on gathering restrictions issued under current public health orders by the Alberta Chief Medical Officer of Health can be found on the Alberta Health website at <https://www.alberta.ca/restrictions-on-gatherings.aspx>
 - Additional restrictions may be in place in many First Nations across the province. If applicable, check with your Chief and Council or Director of Emergency Management for additional restrictions in your community.

- Physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet)** must be maintained between individuals from different households. Ensure the size of the venue allows for this physical distancing. Seek the assistance of your community's EPHO to make this determination.
 - If needed, reduce the number of participants or change the venue to allow for physical distancing.
 - Consider moving a gathering from an inside venue to outdoors.
 - Stagger the time of arrivals and departures from gatherings.
 - Place markings/posters/decals to indicate 2 metre spacing.
 - Space chairs, tables at least 2 metres apart.
 - If possible, set up a one-way flow from entrance to exit.
 - Post signage to encourage physical distancing.
 - Reinforce general personal practices to maintain physical distancing, such as avoiding greetings like handshakes, high fives, fist bumps and hugs.

- Promote personal protective practices** (coughing and sneezing etiquette, hand hygiene)
 - Provide access to handwashing stations with liquid soap and paper towels, and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol based).
 - Provide tissues.
 - Provide touch free garbage bins lined with disposable garbage bags.
 - Post signage on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

- Provide information to participants on COVID-19, and on the steps being taken at the gathering to prevent spread.**
 - Information on COVID-19 can be obtained from the local Health Centre, or FNIHB staff as well as through the One Health Alberta Portal - <https://www.onehealth.ca/ab/ABCovid-19>
 - Notify participants to monitor for symptoms for 14 days after the gathering, and to get tested.
 - Encourage participants to download the ABTraceTogether contact tracing app. Further information can be found on the Alberta Health website at <https://www.alberta.ca/ab-trace-together.aspx>

- Discourage the sharing of food, drinks or utensils.**
 - Provision of food and drinks in gatherings is discouraged because of the increased risk of spreading COVID-19.
 - Family-style, potluck, buffet style meals are considered high risk and should be avoided.
 - Attendees should be encouraged to bring their own food and beverages.
 - If food or drink will be provided:
 - As always, food handlers should follow safe food practices such as protecting foods from contamination, minimizing direct handling of food, maintaining temperatures and preventing cross contamination of foods.
 - Food or drink should be served in pre-packaged or individual portions by a small number of designated individuals.
 - Use disposable napkins, plates, glasses, utensils and cutlery, if possible.

- Discourage the sharing of any items/objects/equipment** that cannot be cleaned and disinfected between people handling it.

- **People who have any symptoms should not attend.** Symptoms can include, but are not limited to, cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat (even if they appear mild or resemble a cold).
 - Post signs that notify participants of the symptoms to watch for, and for those who may have been exposed to COVID-19 to not attend.
 - Consider screening of participants and organizers (where applicable) for symptoms of fever, sore throat, cough, runny nose or difficulty breathing.

- **Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting** of surfaces that are touched often (handles, taps, toilets, tables, railings, switches, chairs, countertops, etc.). Refer to the Alberta Health Services document [COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Environmental Cleaning of Public Facilities](#)

- **Encourage attendees to wear [non-medical masks](#).**
 - Even when wearing masks, attendees should always try to maintain a two-metre distance from anyone who is not a member of their household.

- **Singing, cheering** in groups is a high-risk activity because infected people can transmit the virus through their saliva or respiratory droplets.

There is no evidence to determine exactly what a safe distance would be between the individuals performing these activities and others, but distances greater than 2 metres can reduce risk.

Gatherings that include singing – soloists or in small groups – should take the following precautions:

- Consider keeping singers completely separate from the audience and each other by livestreaming individuals singing separately.
 - Limit the number of people singing in the same place to the fewest possible.
 - Have people sing facing away from others or otherwise creating separation using an acrylic barrier such as Plexiglas.
 - Use pre-prepared audio or video recordings.
 - If appropriate, have singers wear face masks while singing.
 - Dancing – dancers should maintain physical distancing between other dancers and attendees from different households.
 - Use chalk lines on pavement, spray paint on grass, and tape on flooring to mark spaces for dancers.
-
- **Develop a response plan** on steps to take in the event that a participant develops symptoms while at your gathering, or within 14 days following the gathering. This includes:
 - Keeping a record of participants to ensure contact tracing should there be exposure to COVID-19 during the gathering.
 - Identifying a dedicated space to immediately isolate a symptomatic participant from others.
 - Cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces that may have come into contact with the symptomatic participant.
 - Requiring hand hygiene and masking of the symptomatic participant.

For further information ISC-FNIHB staff, including the Medical Officers of Health and Environmental Public Health Officers, can provide guidance around public health measures when planning any type of gathering/event. For any questions or for further information, please contact your local Environmental Public Health Officer, or email sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca

For more information, see:

- Government of Canada – [Risk mitigation tool for gatherings and events operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Indigenous Services Canada – Alberta Region Practical Guidance for Funerals, Wakes or Memorials During the Current COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- Government of Alberta [Relaunch Guidance documents](#) (examples include: [Places of Worship](#), [Funeral Homes](#), [Outdoor Events](#), [Indoor Events](#), [Drive In Events](#), [Rodeos](#), etc.)

The **Hope for Wellness Help Line** is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week to support members of your community experiencing emotional distress and may be reached directly by dialling 1-855-242-3310 or via online chat at www.hopeforwellness.ca . Additional mental health resources can on found on the Alberta One Health Portal at <http://www.onehealth.ca/ab/ABCovid-19> .

References:

Alberta Health: COVID-19 Info for Albertans - <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx#toc-2>

Risk mitigation tool for gatherings and events operating during the COVID-19 pandemic - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assesment.html>