

Guidelines for Outdoor Events

July 14, 2021

All businesses, organizations and employees need to follow the Health Protection Act Order and public health requirements to limit the spread of COVID-19. It is important that we all understand the current restrictions and public health advice currently in place. You can read the full Health Protection Act Order [here](#).

This document is designed for event organizers, venues and facilities planning to host outdoor gatherings or events. This document will guide you through building a plan that will help our province limit the spread of COVID-19.

What are Cohort Events?

Events may operate above using zones or cohorts by developing a safety plan that demonstrates how organizers will manage multiple groups of patrons or guests. For example, if current outdoor gathering limits are 150, a music festival may operate two zones of 150 people, ensuring the zones do not mix and each zone has its own washrooms, entrances, exits, concessions etc. Further guidance on operating cohort events will be outlined throughout this document.

Safety Plan Process

- All events whether indoor or outdoor require the development of a safety plan.
- A copy of the safety plan should be on-site during the event at all times.
- Events that fall within current gathering limits do not require approval of their safety plan from the province. Compliance officers may visit the event site without notice to ensure the safety plan is being adhered to.
- Events that plan to operate cohorts must develop a safety plan and send it to NSeconomy@novascotia.ca 30 days prior to the event. The plan will be reviewed, and event flagged for future inspection by compliance officers.

What to Consider Before Developing a Safety Plan

If you plan to operate a cohort style event with multiple zones your plan must outline:

- How many zones can be managed.
- How you plan to minimize or prevent crossover of zones at all times. This must include separate entrances/exits, separate washrooms, separate concessions for each group/zone and separate walking paths into and out of the venue. If separate entrances, exits, concessions and washrooms aren't feasible, your plan must clearly outline how zones will be formed and managed, how you will prevent mixing and mingling between zones, and how these instructions will be communicated to audiences. If this is not possible, you cannot have multiple zones.
- The process for managing and monitoring the individual zones.

For all events (cohort style, events within gathering limits) your plan must outline:

- How you will sell tickets to existing households or close social groups in accordance with current gathering limits. Households and close social groups can sit or group together without physical distancing but must remain 2 metres / 6 feet from other households / close social groups.
- The logistics of the event activity and how guidelines will be followed and monitored.
- A plan for tracking all participants, volunteers, attendees, and event officials. It is recommended facilities keep these records for a minimum of 30 days after the event or activity has taken place.
- An emergency plan for individuals displaying symptoms and how they will be isolated.
- How the organizers will communicate the public health requirements to stakeholders and attendees prior to and during the event.
- How the organizers will ensure the use of non-medical masks by staff and volunteers when maintaining physical distancing is not possible (exception - when eating or drinking while seated while maintaining a 2 metre / 6-foot distance).
- How organizers will limit risk of transmission and promote hygiene practices.
- How workers, staff and/or vendors will be managed for the public health protocols.

Organizers must develop a plan for each specific activity. For example, a soccer game with spectators might look different than an event featuring vendors or a concert. Plans may need to be adjusted as new information regarding COVID-19 becomes available and must meet the requirements of the latest Health Protection Act Order. It is recommended to consult with your local municipality, sport/cultural governing body, local occupational health and safety office, local community officials, venue tenants or others who may be impacted throughout the development of your facility plan.

Gathering Limits

Stay up to date on the latest gathering limits and how they apply to your operation.

- All persons in attendance must practice 2m (6 feet) physical distancing, except persons residing in the same household or close social groups in accordance with current gathering limits.
- These gathering limits may change and it is the responsibility of the organizer to stay up to date on public health requirements and adjust its plan as needed.
- Events taking place inside enclosed outdoor structures including tents are considered indoor events regardless of whether side panels are removed, or walls are open.

Developing Your Plan – Required Information

The following outlines a series of required protocols to ensure appropriate management of attendee safety, event zones within the gathering limits, capacity management, flow of people, cleaning, concessions, staff, and suppliers. These protocols must align with the Health Protection Act Order and should be regularly monitored and adjusted based on evolving public health requirements. Organizers must do a risk assessment of potential hazards at their event site, which will inform what control measures are required.

Tip: Developing an event site map demonstrating seating, washrooms, traffic flow, booths, stages, entry and exit points for zones etc. is a recommended part of your safety plan. It is beneficial in executing your plan and helpful for compliance officers visiting your event site.

Seating & Ticketing

For cohort style events:

- The seating and ticketing plan must be designed to facilitate zones, while maintaining physical distancing between households or close social groups in accordance with current gathering limits, enabling contact tracing and supporting the health and safety of event staff and attendees.
- A list of patrons/guests/staff/volunteers will be provided to Public Health upon request to assist with any necessary contact tracing.
- Each ticket will be assigned a zone based on location in the venue or event site which will indicate to the ticket holder which entrance/exit they must use as well as concessions and washroom amenities. Assigning zones based on seating location in the venue or event site will prevent zone crossover and enable efficient contact tracing if required.

For all ticketed events:

- All seating or seating areas are required to be assigned in advance through a ticketing system.
- All seating must allow for a minimum of 2 metres / 6 feet between each party and/or group of seats.
- For facilities without fixed seating or chairs (e.g. a field/grass area) visual cues such as drawn circles or boundaries should be drawn or added to the ground to encourage physical distancing between households/close social groups.
- Tickets must not be sold in groups larger than the maximum number outlined in current gathering limits for households or close social groups.
- If all those attending the event are from the same family/social bubble, the ticket purchaser will be the primary contact used for contact tracing and must be able to provide the names of those in their party.
- If those attending the event are not part of the same family/social bubble, the names and phone numbers of each patron must be collected in case there is a requirement for contact tracing.

- At the time of ticket purchase, organizers should consider the opportunity to provide a disclaimer notifying the purchaser that their contact information is being collected in the event that contact tracing is required. The purchaser should agree to this requirement to finalize their order. Following the purchase, information should be provided outlining requirements for [self-assessment](#), travel restrictions and individual public health protocols, like masking, hand hygiene and physical distancing. A summary of COVID-19 safety requirements should be on all tickets and reinforced at the venue through signage and announcements, if possible. Venues/events are also encouraged to make COVID-19 safety requirements available online via their website, social media and emails sent prior to the event.
- Attendee contact information must be maintained for a minimum of 30 days and provided to Public Health upon request in case COVID-19 is detected and contact tracing is required.
- Safety plans should include a seating map outlining locations of available seats or seating areas for the event.

For free events:

- Contact information must be collected for each person entering the event grounds and maintained for a minimum of 30 days in case COVID-19 is detected and contact tracing is required.
- Organizers should consider reservations for attendees prior to the event in order to control gathering sizes and collect contact tracing information.

Zones & Crowd Management

Physical distancing of 2 metres or 6 feet between all individuals helps reduce the spread of illness. Gatherings make this more difficult, so your plan must implement measures to encourage physical distancing across all facets of your facility and operation. Attendees from the same family/social bubble are not required to physically distance from one another.

For cohort style events:

- Each ticket holder must be assigned to a zone within the venue or event site.
- Zones are required to have their own designated washrooms, concessions, entrances/exits

- An outline of how zones will be managed and prevent crossover between zones must be provided.
- Signage and/or colour coding systems should be used to manage each zone, which can help attendees clearly understand zone boundaries.
- From the entry point through to the seating location, a mix of staff, stanchions and markings will be used to separate the zones and guide attendees to their seats.

For all events:

- A 2-metre / 6-foot physical distance must be maintained:
 - Between families or groupings of people
 - Between staff and/or volunteers throughout the venue/event grounds, including back of house
 - Between any booth or vendor spaces
 - Between participants/attendees not from within the same family/social bubble
- Have staff monitor line-ups to ensure physical distancing is being maintained.
- Stagger pickup times (e.g., for food)
- Visual cues such as drawing circles in the venue or on the event grounds where seating isn't available to encourage physical distancing between households/close social groups.
- Signage should be posted throughout the venue or event grounds to promote physical distancing.
- Clear directional signage for entry and exit locations should be displayed, with extra staff to monitor physical distancing.
- Signage must be posted to promote and ensure one-way traffic for entering and exiting the venue or event grounds, as well as the flow of people to and from washrooms and concessions.
- Increase the distance between seating, picnic tables and benches to ensure there is a 2-metre/6-foot distance between groups.

Free Events

Organizers providing free events are responsible for managing gathering limits, crowd control, and all other health and safety requirements found in the Health Protection Act Order. Event organizers must be a provincially recognized business or organization with experience in event management. Providing free entertainment, games, and food carries a high risk of gathering large, unmanaged crowds. If you are advertising an event or providing activities that will attract crowds to a public area, you are responsible for managing that area. Organizers should consider:

- A clear event area including seating areas should be fenced or cordoned off to control gathering sizes.
- Contact information should be collected from attendees entering event area and held for 30 days following the event.
- Organizers should constantly monitor the capacity of the event area, counting guests as they enter and exit.

Public health guidance for drive-in events

Drive-in events must follow the same public health measures as other events (e.g., hand hygiene, physical distancing, etc.); however, there are some unique considerations for these types of events:

- Vehicles must be parked in a manner that ensures 2m/6 feet physical distancing between patrons/vehicles
- The requirements for maximum numbers at a gathering and physical distancing between groups must be met
- No sharing of items between vehicles
- Only those in your social group can travel in the same vehicle
- Physical distancing must be maintained in common spaces (washrooms, food service areas)
- Consider flow of traffic in and out of event, including the use of unidirectional traffic and visual cues
- Consider contactless entry and payments for admissions, concessions, etc.

- Limit how often individuals leave their car (no loitering outside of car, should only leave to use washroom and purchase food)
- Ensure adequate number of handwashing facilities or hand sanitizing stations
- Ensure staffing levels allow for continued monitoring for maximum gathering limits and physical distancing

Washrooms

- Limit the number of occupants in the restroom at one time to allow for physical distancing.
- Do not allow lines or crowds to form near the restroom without maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres/6 feet from other people. Clearly post signs or markers to help attendees maintain the appropriate physical distance of at least 2 metres/6 feet.
- Ensure open restrooms are:
 - Operational with functional toilets
 - Cleaned and disinfected regularly, particularly high-touch surfaces such as faucets, toilets, stall doors, doorknobs. High touch surfaces, like those found in a washroom, should be cleaned and disinfected twice daily at a minimum and more often if necessary.
 - Cleaned and disinfected with a Health Canada-recommended disinfectant, which is stored away from children.
 - A plumbed washroom must include sink, soap, and paper towels. For non-plumbed washrooms, handwashing stations should be provided. All should include no-touch trash cans. It is recommended that hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer) also be provided.

Portable washrooms for outdoor activities

- If you are providing portable toilets at your outdoor event, you must also provide portable handwashing stations and ensure that they remain stocked throughout the duration of the event. If possible, also provide hand sanitizer stations, ideally ones that are touch free.
- Organizers should develop a maintenance plan in place that outlines the number of washrooms and handwashing/sanitizing stations required, the frequency of cleaning, staffing requirements, etc.
- 2-3 portable toilets per 100 people is recommended

Food & Beverage Service

- Place minimum 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers at vending area for customer use.
- Use single service condiments, dispensed by staff, to avoid contamination.
- Avoid contact and maintain physical distance from customers when providing food orders.
- Consider a limited food and beverage menu that will be offered in each zone.
- Consider the option of offering food and beverage through a dedicated online/in-seat app.
- Attendees must remain seated at their table except when waiting to be seated, going to the bar to order, going to the bathroom and getting ready to leave.
- All vendors must have a food permit, unless exempt. Information on food permits can be found at: <https://novascotia.ca/nse/food-protection/retailers.asp> or by calling 1-877-936-8476.
- Visual cues such as directional arrows and stanchions, ropes, or other form of physical crowd management will be in place at all concessions areas to facilitate physical distancing in queues.
- Make cashless payment options available and encouraged in all concession areas and bars.
 - If not an option, dedicate one staff person to handling money and one to food service if you are unable to adequately wash hands between tasks.
- Follow the Restaurant COVID-19 Rapid Recovery Guide for Nova Scotia Reopening Resource for Foodservice Operators
- Food trucks are permitted at events. Customers may order food at the truck while maintaining physical distancing and return to a seating area to consume it.
- Events wishing to provide free food (e.g., hot dogs on Canada Day) are discouraged from doing so as this activity increases risk of larger groups congregating in a particular area and requires extensive oversight by staff/volunteers. Organizers wishing to provide this service must contact the [Department of Environment and Climate Change](#).

Vendor/Booth Sampling

Product sampling, including food and alcohol, is allowed under the following parameters:

- Vendors may provide individual, prepackaged samples (no alcohol) for consumption at home or in designated eating areas on site
- Samples may only be made available by the vendor when requested
- Signage to be placed at vendor booths that provide samples and throughout market to indicate where the samples can be consumed
- Vendors must wear a face mask at all times
- Customers must wear face masks at all times in indoor markets, and at outdoor markets where physical distancing cannot be consistently maintained
- Masks may only be removed when customers are seated in designated eating areas on-site consuming food or beverage

This will need to be monitored by the organizer/vendors to ensure customers are only removing masks while seated in designated areas, and not at vendor booths/walking through the market.

Serving Alcohol at Your Event

If you plan to serve alcohol at your events, there are several regulations that apply under the Health Protection Order:

- Alcohol can be sold according to current public health measures
- You are permitted to have a bar where attendees can walk up and order a drink, however physical distancing measures must be in place. Attendees must remain seated at their table except when waiting to be seated, going to the bar to order, going to the bathroom and getting ready to leave. (i.e. no stand up receptions)
- You must ensure food and alcohol remains at the table
- Stand-up receptions, mingling/networking events are prohibited (including at wedding receptions)
- Physical distancing of 2 meters/6 feet must remain in place between households or close social groups, as described in the current gathering limits.

We encourage you well in advance of your event to contact Alcohol, Gaming, Fuel and Tobacco to discuss obtaining a Special Occasion Liquor License at 1-877-565-0556 or <https://novascotia.ca/sns/access/alcohol-gaming.asp>.

Selling Merchandise at Your Event

If your event is cohort style/zoned and you are selling event or performer merchandise, you must have a separate merchandise area for each zone. Attendees are not permitted to cross over zones. Physical distancing must be in place between points of transaction.

Sanitization

Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects help prevent the spread of COVID-19. This will reduce the chance of people becoming ill after touching dirty surfaces. Cleaning does not kill germs but helps remove them from the surface. Disinfecting refers to using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. This is most effective after surfaces are cleaned. Both steps are important to reduce the spread of infection. Do not mix cleaning agents and disinfectants together or use multiple disinfectants together.

- High-touch areas (e.g. tables, railings, toilets, cash boxes, etc.) should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice daily and more often as needed.
- An approved disinfectant must be used to eliminate the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Consult the products instruction for proper dilution and use for disinfection. Consult the product's Safety Data Sheets for storage and handling requirements. For a list of recommended disinfectants, refer to: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- Items used between customers (i.e. point of sale systems) must be disinfected between each use.
- Sharing of items used by venue staff, participants or performers (i.e. equipment, instruments) should be avoided.
- Equipment, instruments, and other items that must be shared or passed between individuals must be cleaned and disinfected at an increased frequency. If this is not possible, individuals touching these props must perform hand hygiene before and after touching the items.

- Try to avoid the use and handling of cash by using contactless payment. If not possible, it is recommended you keep the cash you receive separate from the cash you use to make change. Try to round your prices to dollar values that will not require change. Have a designated area on the table for customers to leave cash.
- Waste should be disposed of regularly and hands should be washed after waste removal. No-touch waste receptacles should be used.
- Plan should outline the frequency of cleaning high-touch surfaces and protocols used for the cleaning and sanitization of front-of-house and participant/team spaces post event.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizing stations (minimum 60%) should be located throughout the facility zones and at seating area entrance points with posted signage to support hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

Declarations

Achieving a safe venue/event requires that an effective and responsible social contract be in place with patrons. They need to participate and contribute to achieving a safe event. Events and venues should include a patron declaration step in their COVID safety plans. The following questions should be used to identify individuals with a heightened risk for transmission:

- Are you feeling unwell?
- Are you a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19?
- Are you waiting for results of a COVID-19 test?
- Are you self-isolating for any reason?
- A Covid-19 daily check could also be conducted.

These declarations must be asked at the ticket purchase stage and upon arrival at the venue/event. If the guest answers 'yes' to any of these questions, they should not be permitted entry into the event. Organizers should have a plan in place to contact local law enforcement in cases of non-compliance.

Communicating Your Plan

Ensuring attendees, clients and participants are properly informed and reminded about requirements is important to delivering a safe event and ensuring an enjoyable experience for all.

- Consider how the facility will communicate the new COVID-19 protocols to stakeholders and ticket buyers well in advance of the changes taking place.
- Make announcements throughout the event to remind attendees of the protocols.
- Use available social media channels and website to post the protocols.
- Signage throughout the event grounds and back-of-house spaces to outline COVID-19 protocols, including reinforcement of the importance of monitoring for symptoms.

Employee & Supplier Protocols

Recognize the importance of keeping your staff safe and ensuring that they are properly informed and trained.

- Provide advance communication on what to expect when returning to work, including information about new procedures.
- Conduct training with event staff, volunteers, and third-party suppliers to ensure they are aware of the protocols and their responsibilities for enforcement.
- Implement an employee/volunteer self-assessment tool to ensure a [pre-screening](#) prior to reporting to work. Staff/volunteers who feel unwell or have limitations due to travel restrictions will be asked to stay home. If an employee begins showing signs or symptoms of COVID-19 once arriving to work, they must be isolated and sent home to complete the COVID-19 self-assessment tool for further guidance.
- Staff and volunteers should be restricted to entering and exiting the event grounds through dedicated staff entrances that require an individual sign in process to support contact tracing.
- Supplier access to the events grounds should be managed through a single-entry point and require sign-in.
- Require all staff, regardless of role, to wear a non-medical mask while at the event.
- Provide cleaning stations in all staff areas, including disinfectant wipes and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- Post proper handwashing guidelines in all staff areas to ensure frequent reminders.
- Consider the appointment of an event safety lead by team and shift to ensure protocols are adhered to.
- Provide safety checklists by team and shift for clear monitoring of protocols and procedures.
- Contact information for all event participants – volunteers, staff, performers, suppliers etc.- should be maintained for a minimum of 30 days following the event in case contact tracing is necessary.

Events with live performances or public speakers must consult health and safety guidelines for [musicians and vocalists](#).

Event Budget Considerations

Planning an event during the COVID-19 pandemic may impact or require additional costs to running your event safely.

- Consider your refund policy for attendees and the impacts it may have on your budget
- Plan for event sunk costs should your event be postponed or cancelled
- Costs for face masks or an additional PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)
- Providing hand wash stations or hand sanitizer
- Understand what your event insurance policy covers and does not cover
- Conduct a risk assessment to understand the potential risks around the event and understand the potential budget impacts from those risks

Volunteers

Depending on the scope and scale of your event it's important to consider the number of volunteers you require to be at your event. Perhaps there are ways to reduce the number of volunteers required or maybe you need more to help manage COVID-19 protocols.

- Consider the required number of volunteers needed to help ensure COVID-19 protocols are followed
- Will you be supplying non-medical masks, hand sanitizer and/or gloves, or will volunteers be required to bring their own?

- Ensure training is provided to volunteers prior to the event to make them aware of the event COVID-19 protocols
- Review the number of volunteers needed to ensure you have enough to cover volunteers who may take ill or are not able to show up due to illness.
- Implement a self-assessment tool to ensure a [pre-screening](#) prior to reporting for a volunteer shift.

Private Property Event Guidelines (e.g. - wedding receptions)

All events must follow all public health measures outlined in the Health Protection Act order, including (but not limited to) gathering limits, physical distancing and masks.

Organizers wishing to host an event on private property must consult these [health and safety guidelines](#).

Tradeshows, Exhibitions, and Permanent Flea Markets

If your event involves a variety of vendors or trade booths, you will need to build the following into your plan:

- Every booth/vendor should have 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers available
- All staff must wear a non-medical mask
- Site plans must maintain a minimum six-foot physical distance between each booth.
- Patron to patron interactions between exhibitor booths must maintain six-foot physical distancing.
- Product sampling, including food and alcohol, is currently prohibited at special events, markets, or trade shows.

Farmers Markets

Health & safety guidelines for Farmer's Markets can be found [here](#).

Tournaments

The hosting of tournaments and events can create additional challenges and pressures for facilities. It's important to consider that some facilities may not be able to support the hosting of tournaments and events. Hosting tournaments should be at the discretion of each individual facility based on their capacity and ability to host safely. Since each tournament or event is unique, it's recommended that organizations reach out and work closely with facilities to determine the requirements. Organizers of tournaments must implement the required guidelines for events and for venues and consider the following:

- Consider the number of teams for the tournament. It may be easier for the facility and the organizer to have a smaller number of participating teams to manage the logistics and Health Protection Act Order requirements
- Where appropriate, eliminate or reduce the number of items at the event that will be handled by multiple people. This could include items such as programs, handouts, promotional materials, prizes, clipboards and pens
- Use websites and/or applications to post tournament results
- Distributing promotional items such as brochures is strongly discouraged.
- Avoid cash payments where possible; use contactless payment options for ticketing and 50/50 draws
- Consider how you will avoid crossover of tournament volunteers and officials between different teams and games being played
- Facilities should not host more than one tournament at a time (1 tournament per weekend)
- Participants are not to shake hands at the end of the game
- You must follow [Return to Sport Guidelines](#). For protocols specific to your sport, please contact your affiliated Provincial Sport Organization Hospitality Rooms Avoid offering hospitality rooms for participants and attendees.

Ceremonies/Awards

- You must ensure the presentation of awards and ceremonies are completed in a manner where participants are not in close contact with one another.
- Consider providing the awards on a table where each individual medal/award can be separated and picked up by each individual.
- Participants should not shake hands during a presentation/ceremony.

Inflatables/Bouncy Castles

- Handwashing and/or hand sanitizing must be completed prior to entry into the device and again upon exiting. Hand sanitizer must be 60% alcohol based.
- Masks must be worn inside.
- Capacity of the device should be reduced from normal levels to allow for more physical distance between occupants.
- Devices must be closely supervised by staff to ensure physical distancing and mask use.
- High touch surfaces must be cleaned between each use with an [approved cleaning product](#). (see above section on Sanitization)
- If the device has any porous surfaces that cannot easily be cleaned, they must be removed prior to use.
- Procedures must be in place to ensure organized and physically distanced entering and exiting of the device.

Organizer/Event Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the event organizers and the event facility/venue to maintain oversight of the gathering and to ensure all persons in attendance comply with the requirement of the event's COVID-19 plan as well as the requirements under Nova Scotia's Health Protection Act Order. Inspectors will be onsite, without notice. In the situation where an outdoor facility/event grounds/municipality is renting the space to an organization or event, it is the responsibility of the facility/event grounds/municipality to ensure the safety guidelines are provided in advance and followed throughout. Facilities/event grounds/municipalities are encouraged to work with the organization to develop and submit a plan to the facility for review.

Parades, Fireworks

Parades and fireworks are strongly discouraged. These sorts of activities have potential to draw large, unmanageable crowds and would require a very high level of logistical planning and resources to execute. Event organizers accept full responsibility for ensuring all staff, volunteers, and participants adhere to current health and safety protocols.

Event Organizer / Rental Responsibilities

The renter of the facility/event grounds must ensure each event is organized and hosted within the requirements as set out in the Health Protection Act Order and within the requirements as defined by the facility. The manager/owner of the facility/event grounds are ultimately responsible for the oversight of all protocols related to their facility/event grounds.

Enforcement

Government inspectors may do spot checks at events without notice and will request of copy of the event/organizer's COVID-19 plan. They will ensure the event is following its plan and meeting public health and safety requirements. Failure to comply or manage the requirements of the Health Protection Act Order may result in closure of the event and/or penalties. If you have any questions or concerns about these guidelines you can contact the Events Nova Scotia Team.

Resources:

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/>

<https://events.novascotia.ca/event-news>

<https://novascotia.ca/reopening-nova-scotia/prevention-plans/#reopening>

<https://novascotia.ca/sns/access/alcohol-gaming.asp>

<https://novascotia.ca/sns/paal/nse/paal006.asp>