

COVID-19 Safe Operating Requirements for Community Gardens

On April 25, 2020 the Government of Ontario lifted certain COVID-19 restrictions, allowing community gardens to operate following the guidance of the local Medical Officer of Health. These requirements provide current guidance, as of April 29, 2020, from Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) under Dr. Piotr Oglaza, Medical Officer of Health and CEO.

Community gardens play an important role in providing spaces for residents to grow their own food, increase access to healthy foods and get active outdoors. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, public safety must be the top priority. Until further notice, community gardens are not a place for social gatherings. In-person events, work parties, workshops or potlucks are strictly prohibited. Should any guidelines change with respect to provincially mandated physical distancing guidelines, those guidelines will also apply.

Under the Emergency Order, only gardens with the capacity to follow the guidelines are permitted to operate.

COVID-19 Public Health Guidelines for Community Garden Use

Garden users and plot owners should ensure that they are familiar with all rules and guidelines prior to accessing the garden.

- Follow HPEPH guidelines and DO NOT come to the garden if you are experiencing any of the following:
 - 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 (nausea/vomiting/diarrhea/stomach pain).
 - Close contact with a case of COVID-19.
 - Close contact with someone who is ill with respiratory symptoms and/or has travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days.
- Everyone in the garden must always maintain physical distancing of 2 metres (unless gardening with members of the same household).
 - No guests are allowed in the community garden.
 - No gathering in or around the community garden, except with household members.
 - Children should only be brought to garden on an as-needed basis and should be instructed to follow physical distancing and hygiene recommendations.
 - No pets are allowed in the community garden.
- Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling common equipment such as hoses or gates, and before and after gardening. If there is not a sink available, bring alcohol-based hand sanitizer and sanitize hands regularly.
 - Remember gloves are not a substitute for washing hands.
 - Avoid touching your nose, mouth, eyes and face.
- If personal mask use is chosen as an additional precaution:
 - Wash hands before putting personal mask on.
 - Personal masks must not be shared with others.
 - Masks and single-use gloves must be disposed of in a lined bin only.
- Bring your own garden tools and gloves. Clean and sanitize tools after use, following the manufacturer's instructions.
 - Each gardener must wear their own pair of gloves. Sharing is not permitted.
 - Please contact your garden manager or coordinator if bringing your own tools is not an option for you.

- Place all trash in proper garbage receptacle or take garbage with you to dispose of at home.
- Keep trips to and time spent at garden to a minimum - plan ahead!
- Adhere to the garden schedule and do not attend the garden when it is not your scheduled time.
- Let your coordinator know if you need support maintaining your garden.

Directives for Garden Coordinators and Garden Managers

Before opening gardens, garden coordinators and garden managers must ensure the following are in place:

Physical Distancing

- Post signage that only garden members/owners can access the garden.
- Everyone in the garden must always maintain physical distancing of 2 metres (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.
- When scheduling times, consider the space between plots and stagger accordingly to maximize the space between gardeners at the time of use and ensure that physical distancing of 2 metres can be maintained.
- Remove or tape-off picnic tables and other structures meant for communal seating and gathering.

Infection Control: Cleaning and Disinfection

Hand hygiene is an important means of preventing the spread of COVID-19. All community gardens should consider ways that they can encourage and support their gardeners' hand hygiene:

- Instruct garden users and plot owners to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before entering and after leaving the garden site, as well as after using shared equipment (e.g. garden hose, wheel barrow, etc.).
- Post signage at the garden entrance(s) and spaces where shared equipment is held.
 - [How to Wash Your Hands & How to Use Hand Sanitizer – Public Health Ontario](#)
 - [Physical Distancing – Hastings Prince Edward Public Health](#)
- If possible, provide hand sanitizer and/or a hand washing station at the garden, with signage.
 - Sanitizer should be at least 70% alcohol.
 - If the handwashing station is in a bathroom, the bathroom needs to be equipped with water under pressure, liquid hand soap, and paper towels. Bathrooms are required to be cleaned at least twice daily, or more frequently as needed.
- Encourage gardeners to bring hand sanitizer with them when gardening. If hands are visibly soiled, hand washing is recommended in place of hand sanitizer.

When possible and feasible, community gardens should consider other measures that would curtail the spread of COVID-19 such as:

- Remove shared tools and gloves and encourage gardeners to bring their own.
 - If removing shared tools is not possible, gardeners are to wear their own gloves when using shared tools or wash their hands after using shared tools. If cleaning tools, be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Ask each gardener to bring and wear their own pair of gloves.
- Set up a sanitizing schedule for equipment and tools using [approved disinfectant and cleaners](#) that are effective for [COVID-19](#):
 - At minimum, clean equipment and high-touch surfaces at opening and closing.
 - Post a sign instructing individuals to wash hands before and after handling common items like hoses, gates etc.

- Garden coordinators are encouraged to develop a system that works for their garden to minimize touching of shared surfaces such as shed doors. To keep up with site work, garden coordinators may wish to have a scheduled rotation of members to perform site maintenance duties.

Communication

- Inform all garden users and plot owners of the guidelines prior to allowing access to the garden.
- Post site-specific signage reminding users of the rules, including the number of persons allowed in the garden at a time, no sharing of food or personal items and physical distancing requirements.
- Post [signage](#) from HPEPH instructing those with symptoms or who have had contact with a case of COVID-19 to not enter the garden.
- Advise garden users and plot owners to monitor their health and to complete a [self-assessment](#) prior to going to the garden each day.
- Direct members to stay home if they are sick.
- Direct all ill members to contact the Hastings Prince Edward Public Health COVID-19 Information Line at 613-966-5500 or 1-800-267-2803 for a COVID-19 risk assessment.
- Revoke access of any member not following the rules set out for garden safety.

Compliance and Enforcement

Non-compliance with these requirements may result in warnings, charges and fines under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. Penalties may be up to \$100,000 per person (per day), one year in jail, up to \$500,000 for the officer or director of a corporation, or up to \$10,000,000 for a corporation.

If you have any questions, or are not able to follow the requirements listed above, contact your Public Health Inspector at 1-800-267-2803 or 613-966-5500, ext. 677 to discuss alternate options to reduce the potential risks to your staff and patrons.

Recommended Resources

[Sustain Ontario - COVID-19 Recommendations for Community Gardens](#)

[Hastings Prince Edward Public Health](#)

[Public Health Ontario](#)

[Public Health Agency of Canada](#)

COVID-19 information is updated daily on our website at hpePublicHealth.ca. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Adapted from Sustain Ontario, Windsor-Essex County Health Unit and KFL&A Public Health.