

COVID-19 Guidance for Cooling Rooms

Extreme heat is associated with a number of health impacts ranging from heat stress to heat stroke, to more serious effects, such as cardiovascular-related disease and/or death. Cooling rooms can provide relief and protection for vulnerable groups who may be at an increased risk for heat-related illnesses.

The following recommendations are intended to help operators of cooling rooms, such as those provided by owners/landlords of multi-unit residential buildings or community-based organizations (e.g. non-profits, religious institutions), to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Owners/landlords and community-based organizations are responsible for ensuring that their cooling room is in compliance with these public health guidelines, and all orders made under the Province of Ontario's [Reopening Ontario Act](#). As every cooling room will be different, it is ultimately the responsibility of owners/landlords and community-based organizations to review their own policies, procedures and site-specific circumstances, and assess their operations, while ensuring that the appropriate infection prevention and control measures are implemented and maintained.

More information about COVID-19 can be found in the Toronto Public Health (TPH) [COVID-19 Fact Sheet](#).

Before Opening

Train staff

- All staff must be aware of the [signs and symptoms](#) associated with COVID-19.
- Train staff on the proper use of personal protective equipment, when required. Refer to [Public Health Ontario](#) resources.

Prepare the cooling room

- Assess the layout and available space within the cooling room.
- Determine the cooling room's capacity limit at any given time that permits adequate physical distancing of two metres (six feet) from each other.
 - To calculate the maximum number of people that should be permitted in the cooling room at any one time, a good rule of thumb is one person per two metres square (four squared metres) of floor space.
- Post signs in high visibility areas indicating the maximum number of people permitted in the cooling room at any one time (e.g. entrances, washrooms).
- Provide chairs/furniture that are easy to clean and disinfect.
- Configure the cooling room to allow for adequate physical distancing:
 - Arrange chairs/seating a minimum of two metres (six feet) apart and/or place signs in fixed seating spaces.

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- Mark seating locations with tape on the floor so that seating can be repositioned easily.
- Consider creating separate spaces for family units (i.e. families who live together do not need to maintain physical distancing between each other), and for people with pets.
- Design a walking flow for the cooling room (e.g. creating one-way routes with prominent signage and/or floor markings) every two metres (six feet), where appropriate (e.g. entrances, washrooms).
- Consider installing cues such as stickers or signs at frequently touched surfaces (e.g. water fountains, elevator buttons) to encourage people to avoid directly touching them with their hands (e.g. use your elbow or the back of your hand).
- Increase ventilation and air flow in areas, if possible.
- Download, print and post signs in a visible location at the entrance and other appropriate areas in cooling room to raise awareness about health and safety measures that can help prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as:
 - [Physical Distancing](#)
 - [Protect Yourself](#)
 - [Information about COVID-19](#)
 - [Wash your Hands](#)
 - [Cover your Cough](#)
 - [Poster for Entrances](#)
 - [Water Filling Station](#)
 - [Tips to Beat the Heat](#)

Screening considerations for cooling rooms

- For supervised cooling rooms (e.g. community based organizations):
 - For cooling rooms which provide staff supervision, it is strongly recommend that active in-person [health screening](#) is conducted for all staff, volunteers and tenants/clients entering the room/space. The questions can be completed on paper, online or by asking people directly.
 - Designate an area outside, near the main entrance of the cooling room, as a screening station.
 - The area should be clearly identified as the screening station.
 - Post signs in a visible location clearly explaining the screening process, and the rules and conditions for entry (see the [Posters for Entrances](#) as an example).
 - Post signs about the [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
 - The area must allow for a minimum of two metres (six feet) distance between staff/volunteers conducting in-person screening and the individual being screened.
 - Alternatively, a protective barrier (e.g. plexiglass) may be used around the screening station.
 - If physical distancing or a barrier is not possible, staff/volunteers conducting the screening should wear personal protective equipment (e.g. mask, eye protection).
 - Use visual markers/cues spaced two metres (six feet) apart (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) to assist staff, volunteers and tenants/clients in keeping their distance if waiting to be screened.

- For unsupervised cooling rooms (e.g. multi-unit residential buildings):
 - Where in-person screening cannot be conducted by staff on-site, encourage individuals to [self-screen](#) for COVID-19 symptoms and exposures prior to entry.

Alternate room/space for persons with symptoms or with other high-risk exposures

- Designate an alternate room/space which is separate from the main cooling room to accommodate individuals who answered **YES** to any of the screening questions.
 - If an alternate room/space is not available for individuals with symptoms or with other high-risk exposures, consider creating a private space within the cooling room using dividers or curtains.
- Where possible, the alternate room/space should have:
 - A separate entrance and exit.
 - A separate washroom.
 - Partitions separating individuals, in addition to other physical distancing measures.
- If an alternate space/room, including a private space within the cooling room, is not feasible, individuals with symptoms or other high-risk exposures may be directed to the nearest [Emergency Cooling Centre](#) on days when a [heat warning](#) is issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada.

During Active Operation

Stay home when you're sick

- Remind staff and volunteers to stay at home and not to come to work if they are sick.
- Visit our webpage to learn about the [symptoms](#) associated with COVID-19.

Implement an attendance reporting policy for staff and volunteers

- Daily attendance records should be maintained and updated when a staff or volunteer is absent.
- Owners and operators should follow-up with staff and volunteers to determine the reason for any unplanned absences.
- If a staff or volunteers absence is due to illness note any symptoms (e.g. fever, sore throat, feeling unwell).
- Refer to the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms](#).
- Advise staff and volunteers to call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000, or their primary health care provider to determine if further care is required. Symptomatic staff/volunteers should seek testing at a COVID-19 [assessment centre](#).
- Monitor attendance records for patterns or trends (e.g. staff/volunteers on the same shifts or over the course of a few days).

Actions to take if staff/volunteers become ill at work

- Staff/volunteers who become ill while at work should be sent home immediately, and directed to our [website](#) for more information about COVID-19.

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- Staff/volunteers exposed to a **confirmed case of COVID-19** will be excluded from work for 14 days.
 - These individuals should also [self-isolate](#) and [monitor for symptoms](#) for the next 14 days. They should be advised to avoid contact with vulnerable people, or settings where vulnerable people reside (e.g. long-term care homes).
- Staff and volunteers should call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000 or their primary health care provider to determine if further care is required. Symptomatic staff/volunteers should seek testing at a COVID-19 [assessment centre](#).
- Symptomatic staff/volunteers who test negative for COVID-19 must be excluded from work until 24 hours after their symptoms have stopped.
- Staff/volunteers who are being managed by TPH (i.e. confirmed cases of COVID-19, household contacts of cases) should follow TPH instructions to determine when they can return to work.
- Staff/volunteers should also report to their Occupational Health and Safety Department prior to returning to work.
- Tests for clearance to return to work are not necessary.

Screen staff, volunteers and tenants/clients for COVID-19

- For supervised cooling rooms:
 - Actively screen staff, volunteers and tenants/clients upon arrival or prior to the start of a shift. See TPHs [sample screening form](#) that can be used.
 - Individuals can be asked the screening questions or can complete a screening form prior to entry.
 - Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available for use at the screening station for individuals who have answered **NO** to all questions prior to entry into the cooling room.
 - Individuals who have answered **YES** to any of the questions should go to a designated alternate room/space to separate them from others. More information about the alternate room/space is provided below.
- For unsupervised cooling rooms:
 - For unsupervised cooling rooms, where in-person screening cannot be conducted by staff on-site, encourage individuals to [self-screen](#) for COVID-19 symptoms and exposures prior to entry.
 - Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available for use at the entrance for individuals who have answered **NO** to all questions prior to entry into the cooling room.
 - Individuals who have answered **YES** to any of the questions should go to a designated alternate room/space to separate them from others. More information about the alternate room/space is provided below.

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Provide an alternate room/space for persons with symptoms or with other high-risk exposures

- Individuals should wear a [cloth mask or face covering](#), and wash their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before entering the alternate space/room.
- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available for use at the entrance to the alternate room/space.
- Encourage individuals with symptoms to visit TPHs [website](#) to learn about [assessment centres](#), and to help determine if further health care is required.
- Staff should wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g. gloves, medical mask), and minimize time spent in these areas.
- Where possible, environmental cleaning and disinfection should be conducted after each use of the alternate room/space. More information on cleaning and disinfecting is provided below.
- If an alternate space/room, including a private space within the cooling room, is not feasible, tenants/clients with symptoms or other high-risk exposures may be directed to the nearest [Emergency Cooling Centre](#) on days when a [heat warning](#) is issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Maintain logs of staff, volunteer, and tenant/client information

- For cooling rooms with staff supervision, it is recommended that logs are kept which detail the name and contact information (i.e. phone number and/or email address) for staff, volunteers and tenants/clients, along with a date, check in and check out time.
- If there is a case of COVID-19 who was contagious while at the cooling room, public health will use that list to notify the staff, volunteers and tenants/clients.
- Logs should be maintained for a minimum of four weeks.

Manage the flow of people in the cooling room to promote physical distancing

- Monitor the cooling room to ensure adherence to the posted capacity limit and that other requirements are being followed.
- Stagger the flow of people entering and exiting the cooling rooms to prevent crowding.
- Consider measures to prevent crowding, such as:
 - Implementing time limits (e.g. during peak use periods) based on individual needs.
 - Creating a schedule with pre-assigned times of use.

Practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- [Wash your hands](#) thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration), provided hands are not visibly soiled.
 - Encourage staff, volunteers and tenants/clients to practice hand hygiene before, during, and after use of the cooling room.
 - Remind staff, volunteers and tenants/clients to avoid touching their face, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

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- [Cover your cough](#) or sneeze with a tissue. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.
- Ensure that staff, volunteers and tenants/clients have the ability to practice hand hygiene often, and when needed:
 - Provide hand sanitizer in dispensers near entrances, service counters and other high-touch locations for staff, volunteer and tenant/client use.
 - Monitor supplies to ensure adequate amounts of liquid soap, paper towel (air dryer if paper towels are not available), hand sanitizer, tissues, and waste receptacles with lined plastic bags.

Practice physical distancing

- [Physical distancing](#) means keeping a distance of two meters (six feet) from others who are not part of your household or social circle.
- Remind staff, volunteers and tenants/clients not to share items, such as food, water bottles, equipment, toys, and supplies and encourage everyone to keep their distance as best as possible.
- Staff, volunteers and tenants/clients must maintain physical distancing in all areas of the cooling room.
- Discourage crowding by advising tenants/clients to return at another time if physical distancing is difficult or not possible.

Wearing of masks and face coverings

- The use of masks or face coverings is required, with some exceptions, in all indoor public spaces as per a new City of Toronto [bylaw](#). More information about the by-law can be found in TPHs [Guidance on Mask and Face Covering Bylaw](#) document.
- For indoor spaces where the bylaw does not apply (e.g. apartment buildings), it is strongly recommended that tenants/clients using the cooling room wear a [cloth mask or face covering](#).
- Masks do not replace the need for physical distancing, hand washing, and staying home when sick.
- Masks should not be placed on young children under age two, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- People showing symptoms of COVID-19 or with other high-risk exposures (i.e. answered **YES** to any of the screening questions) should wear a cloth mask or face covering while using the alternate room/space.

Increase environmental cleaning and disinfection

- Implement enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection policies and procedures.
- High traffic areas and frequently touched surfaces and objects (e.g. doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches, toilet handles, countertops, hand rails) should be cleaned and disinfected by designated staff at least twice per day, and when visibly dirty.
- Provide disinfecting wipes for tenants/clients to wipe down seating areas prior to use.

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- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting washrooms, as required.
- Review Public Health Ontario's [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#) fact sheet.
- Refer to Health Canada's [list of hard-surface disinfectants](#) for information on disinfectants effective against COVID-19.
- Maintain a log to track cleaning and disinfecting activities.

Maintain water fountains and bottle filling stations

- Water fountains and bottle filling stations can be used provided they are cleaned and disinfected twice per day, or more often if needed.
- Encourage tenants/clients to bring their own water bottle to stay hydrated.

Maintain heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems

- Ensure the HVAC system(s) for the cooling room are adequately maintained.
- Where provided, use the highest efficiency filters that are compatible with the HVAC system.
- Cooling rooms provided with ceiling fans should have an upward airflow rotation.
- Keep areas near HVAC inlets and outlets clear.
 - Seating should be arranged away from areas with high airflow (i.e. not in front of air vents).
- If fans are used, they must be positioned to provide an upward movement of air.

Increase communication with staff, volunteers and tenants/clients

- Develop and implement communication platforms to provide information about programs, health and safety measures (e.g. screening, physical distancing, staying home when sick) with staff, volunteers and tenants/clients such as using information boards, websites, email, and newsletters.
- Designate a point of contact (e.g. supervisor) who will be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns from staff, volunteers and tenants/clients.
- Encourage staff and attendees to download the [COVID Alert app](#) so they can be notified directly if they have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.

Ensure workplace health and safety

- Employers must have written measures and procedures for staff safety, including for infection prevention and control.
- Ontario has general information on [COVID-19 and workplace health and safety](#), where employers can learn about their responsibilities and how to protect workers at work.
- Workers can also get information about [health and safety protections](#) at the workplace.

Other Resources

[Staying Healthy in Hot Weather](#)

[COVID-19 Guidance for Employers, Workplaces and Businesses Fact Sheet](#)

[Strategies for Community Partners to Practice Physical Distancing and Reduce the Spread of COVID-19](#)

More Information

For more information, visit our website at www.toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.

References

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *COVID-19 and Cooling Centers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/cooling-center.html>