

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 guidance is intended to support owners and operators of cooling rooms, such as those operated within multi-unit residential buildings or by community-based organizations (e.g. non-profits, religious institutions), in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Owners and operators are responsible for ensuring that their cooling room is operated in compliance with these public health guidelines, and all emergency orders made under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#). Due to site-specific considerations at cooling rooms, it is the responsibility of owners and operators to review their own policies, procedures, and site-specific operations, while ensuring that the appropriate infection prevention and control measures are implemented and maintained.

The aim and purpose of this document is to assist businesses, organizations, and individuals with information related to the Ontario Government's reopening framework as well as Toronto Public Health requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19, while ensuring residents are protected from the potential harmful effects from heat. It is important to know that breaches of some of these directions will constitute offences under provincial regulations or other public health legal requirements. While we aim to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional.

Section 1: General Rules ([Roadmap to Reopen: Step 3](#))

[O. Reg. 364/20](#) requires the person responsible for a business or organization that is open to ensure that the business or organization operates in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, including the requirements set out below:

Compliance with Applicable Laws	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The person responsible for the business or organization must comply with all applicable laws, including the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and regulations made under it.

Public Health Officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The person responsible for the business or organization must follow the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials, including on physical distancing, cleaning or disinfecting.
Health Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively screen every person who works at the business or organization before they enter the premises of the business or organization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See sample Staff Screening Questionnaire. Post signs at all entrances to the premises in a conspicuous location visible to the public to inform individuals on how to self-screen themselves for COVID-19 prior to entering the premises.
Masks and Face Coverings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All persons must wear a mask or face covering that covers their nose, mouth, and chin during any period when they are in an indoor area. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some exceptions apply, including children under the age of two, and people with medical conditions that make wearing a mask difficult. Proof of an exemption is not required. <p>Other Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toronto Bylaw 541-2020, as amended by Bylaw 664-2020 also requires the operator of an establishment, or the owner of an apartment building or condominium corporation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a mask policy. Communicate this policy to employees, patrons and/or residents. Post signs at all entrances to the premises, or entrances to enclosed common areas, that contain the required text included in the bylaw. Train employees on the policy, including exemptions. Train employees on how to communicate with, and accommodate people who may be exempt. See Mask Bylaw Checklist and Sample Policy – available in: [PDF] and [Fillable PDF] More information is available here.
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons who work at the business or organization shall wear appropriate PPE that provides protection of their eyes, nose and mouth if, in the course of providing services, the person: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is required to come within two metres of another person who is not wearing a mask or face covering during any period when that person is in an indoor area; and is not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier from a person described above.

Capacity Limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit the number of people in the place of business or facility so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members of the public are able to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person; and The total number of members of the public in the business or facility at any one time does not exceed 50% capacity or 1,000 people (whichever is less): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This can be determined by taking 50 per cent of the maximum occupant load of the business or facility, or part of a business or facility, as applicable, as calculated in accordance with Ontario Regulation 213/07 (Fire Code), made under the <i>Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997</i>. Physical distancing requirements do not apply to persons whom are from the same household, or members of a household and one other person from outside that household that lives alone, or a caregiver for any of those persons. <p>Post a sign in a location visible to the public (e.g. at entrances) that states the maximum capacity they are permitted to operate under.</p>
Entrances and Managing Lines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that patrons are not permitted to line up or congregate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> outside of the business or place, or at an outdoor attraction or feature within the business or place, unless they are maintaining a physical distance of at least two metres from other groups of persons. inside an indoor part of the business or place unless they are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining a physical distance of at least two metres from other groups of persons; and Wearing a mask or face covering in a manner that covers their mouth, nose and chin, unless they are entitled to any of the exceptions.
Safety Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a safety plan, which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> describes measures and procedures that have been or will be implemented in the business to reduce the spread of COVID-19; includes measures for screening, physical distancing, masks or face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, the wearing of PPE, and preventing and controlling crowding; is in writing and made available to any person for review, upon request; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ is posted in a conspicuous place where it is likely to come to the attention of those working or attending the location. ● See COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist available in: [PDF] and [Fillable PDF] and Instructions for Completing the COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist for more information.
Cleaning and Disinfecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure the following are cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ washrooms, locker rooms, change rooms, showers or similar amenities made available to the public; and ○ any equipment that is rented to, provided to, or provided for the use of members of the public. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applies to computers, electronics and other machines or devices that members of the public are permitted to operate.

Section 2: Strategies for Meeting and Enhancing Compliance

The following strategies are offered to assist owners and operators of cooling rooms in meeting and/or enhancing compliance with the requirements set out in Section 1 of this document.

Measures for all Workplaces, Businesses and Organizations

- Review the [COVID-19 Guidance for Employers, Workplaces and Businesses](#) to plan and implement protocols to keep staff and clients safe.
- Employers must immediately notify Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 as soon as they become aware of two or more people who test positive for COVID-19 within a 14-day interval in connection with their workplace premises, as per [Toronto Public Health Instructions for Workplaces](#).

Staff Training

- Educate staff on the proper [use of masks/face coverings](#). They should change masks when moist or dirty. More information on use of non-medical masks or face coverings can be found [here](#).
- Discourage staff from gathering together in the lunchroom or common areas.
- Educate staff on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:
 - [Wash hands](#) frequently with liquid soap and warm water for at least 15-30 seconds, or use hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) if water and soap is not available.
 - [Cover coughs](#) or sneezes with the elbow or a tissue. Immediately throw the tissue in the garbage and wash hands.

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- Encourage staff 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.
- Staff who become unwell during their shift should advise their supervisor and isolate away from other staff and clients/tenants until they are able to leave the facility.
- Staff should be trained to contact emergency services (i.e. 911) should a person experience severe illness requiring medical attention.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- In addition to the PPE requirements set-out in [Section 1](#), staff should wear PPE consisting of a surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (goggles or face shield) if physical distancing or separation via a physical barrier cannot be maintained.

Health Screening

- For supervised cooling rooms (e.g. community based organizations):
 - In addition to the health screening requirements set out in [Section 1](#), it is strongly recommended that clients are [actively screened](#) prior to entering the cooling room. The questions can be completed on paper, online or by asking people directly.
 - Designate an area outside, near the main entrance, as a screening station for in-person screening.
 - The area should be clearly identifiable as the screening station.
 - Post signs in visible locations clearly explaining the screening process and conditions for entry.
 - The area must allow for at least two metres distance between staff conducting screening and the individual being screened. Alternatively, a protective barrier (e.g. plexiglass) may be equipped around the screening station.
 - If physical distancing or a barrier is not possible, staff conducting the screening must wear appropriate PPE (e.g. medical mask, gloves, face shield/goggles).
 - Temperature checks are not required, nor recommended.
 - Make 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 be provided with and wear a surgical/procedure mask and be directed to the alternate room/space within the cooling room. More information about the alternate room/space is provided [below](#).

- Individuals with symptoms should be encouraged to seek testing at a COVID-19 assessment centre, if they have not already done so.
- For unsupervised cooling rooms (e.g. multi-unit residential buildings):
 - In addition to the health screening requirements set out in [Section 1](#), where in-person screening cannot be conducted by staff on-site, encourage individuals to [self-screen](#) prior to entry.

Alternate Room/Space

- Designate an alternate room/space for individuals who answered **YES** to any of the screening questions.
- The alternate room/space should be separate from the main cooling room/area.
 - 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 main cooling room/area 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.
- Make hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available for use at the entrance to the alternate room/space.
- Staff must wear appropriate PPE and minimize time spent in these areas.
- Environmental cleaning and disinfection should be conducted after each use of the alternate room/space.
- If an alternate room/space, including a private space within the cooling room is not feasible, individuals who answered **YES** to any of the screening questions may be directed to the nearest [Emergency Cooling Centre](#) on days when a [heat warning](#) is issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Entrances and Managing Lines

- Use visual markers, stickers or pylons to encourage physical distancing between persons while waiting outside to be screened.
- Post a staff member at the entrance to control client entry.
- Stagger client entry to prevent crowding.
- Monitor the number of clients entering and leaving.
- Once the capacity limit is reached, allow one client in for every client that leaves.

Capacity Limits

- In addition to the capacity limit requirements set-out in Section 1, businesses and organizations should:
 - Post [signs](#) indicating the capacity limits for rooms which clients, tenants or staff may have access to, such as the cooling room, alternate room/space, washrooms, etc.

Physical Distancing

- Remind staff, volunteers, and clients/tenants to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from those outside their household.
- Post [physical distancing signs](#) at all entrances, service counters, and other appropriate areas within the cooling room.
- Arrange chairs/seating/cots at least two metres apart and/or place signs in fixed seating spaces.
 - Mark seating locations with tape on the floor so that seating can be easily repositioned.
 - Consider creating separate spaces for persons who reside in the same household.
- Design a walking flow for the cooling room (e.g. creating one-way routes with prominent signage and/or floor markings), where appropriate (e.g. entrances, washrooms).
- Place markers or circles on the ground so clients know where to stand when waiting or interacting with staff.
- Install [plexiglass/barriers](#), if possible, where there will be close contact between staff and customers, at service counters and cashiers.
- Temporarily decommission and/or mark unavailable washroom amenities (e.g. toilet stalls, urinals, sinks, showers) such that they are at least two metres apart.
- Monitor the flow of people within the cooling rooms, including washrooms and the alternate room/space, to ensure adherence to the posted capacity limit and that other requirements are followed.
- Assign a staff member to direct clients to seating areas as they arrive.
- Consider measures to prevent crowding, such as:
 - advising clients/tenants to return at another time if physical distancing is difficult or not possible.
 - implementing time limits (e.g. during peak use periods) based on individual needs.
 - creating a schedule with pre-assigned times of use.

Client Records

- In addition to the requirements set-out in [Section 2](#) to collect client names and contact information, records collected should consist of:

- name (first, last);
- contact information (phone number and email address);
- date; and
- check-in and check-out times.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Develop enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection policies and procedures.
- Clean and disinfect seating, furniture, and cots after each use.
 - For unsupervised cooling rooms, provide disinfecting wipes for tenants/clients to wipe down seating areas prior to use.
- Review [guidance](#) for more information.

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 staff, clients and tenants to bring their own water bottle to stay hydrated.
- Post [signs](#) at water fountains and bottle filling stations.

Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC)

- Increase the introduction and circulation of outdoor air by maximizing the outdoor air ratio of the HVAC system settings, or by opening windows and doors, where possible. Avoid recirculating air.
- Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk.
- Ensure the HVAC system(s) are properly maintained.
- Where provided, use the highest efficiency filters that are compatible with the HVAC system.
- Keep areas near HVAC inlets and outlets clear.
 - Seating and activities should be arranged away from areas with high airflow (i.e. not in front of air vents).
- Rooms where indoor ceiling fans are used should have an upward airflow rotation.
- If portable fans are used, limit the blowing of air across people and surfaces by positioning them to provide an upward movement of air.
- For more information, review [COVID-19: Transmission, Aerosols and Ventilation](#).

Communication

- Provide information to clients/tenants about the cooling room's operations (e.g. public health measures).

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- Provide clients/tenants with educational materials about [COVID-19](#) and how to protect themselves from the effects of heat (e.g. [Tips to Beat the Heat](#)).
- Encourage clients/tenants 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.
- Designate a contact person (e.g. supervisor) to respond to COVID-19 concerns from staff, volunteers and clients/tenants.
- Print and post signs in highly visible areas, including at entrances and washrooms as a reminder for everyone to practice public health measures:
 - [COVID-19: Posters & Graphics](#)
 - [COVID-19 Fact Sheet](#)

Other Resources

[COVID-19 Guidance for Employers on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace](#)

[COVID-19 Guidance for Employers on Managing COVID-19 in the Workplace](#)

[Staying Healthy in Hot Weather](#)

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

More Information

For more information, visit our website at 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>

Global Heat Health Information Network. *Planning Checklist - Managing Heat Risk during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ghhin.org/assets/Checklist-COVID-HEAT-final.pdf>