

COVID-19: Safe Operating Recommendations for Halton Community Gardens

On April 25, 2020, the Government of Ontario [lifted certain COVID-19 restrictions](#), allowing allotment and community gardens to operate. These gardens have been identified by the Province as “an essential source of fresh food for some individuals and families, including those who face food insecurity”.

Halton Region Public Health recommends the following measures for community gardens to operate safely.

Entrance Restrictions

- Prior to visiting the garden, gardeners should complete the Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 [self-assessment tool](#), if possible, and follow the instructions provided.
- Prohibit access to anyone who is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or has had close contact with a confirmed case. Individuals who have symptoms of COVID-19 while at the garden are to leave the premises and call their family doctor or 311.
- Consider having someone at the garden to conduct active screening of all visitors prior to entry. This would involve asking questions about COVID-19 symptoms, travel history, and if gardeners have come into contact with any ill individuals. A sample screening tool is posted on the Ministry of Health [webpage](#).
- Allow access to registered members, staff, and volunteers only. Non-members and visitors should not be permitted to enter.
- Permit access to plant, maintain and harvest food only.

Signage Requirements

- Place clear, visible signage at all garden entrances reminding registered members, staff and volunteers about the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and where to seek assistance if they have symptoms.
- Place clear, visible signage throughout the garden—especially locations where shared equipment or tools are located—reminding registered members, staff and volunteers of the requirements that must be followed when using the garden to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

Physical Distancing

- To ensure physical distancing is possible, each community garden should determine the maximum number of people permitted in the garden at one time. It is recommended that a garden schedule be developed to control the number of people permitted in the garden at any time.
- Everyone in the garden must always maintain physical distancing of 6 feet or 2 metres (unless gardening with members of the same household).
- Close and/or block off all non-essential amenities such as picnic tables and benches.
- Cancel any social events to discourage gatherings. Prohibit events such as flower festivals, children’s events, training and other programming.

- Children should only be brought into a garden on an as-needed basis and should be instructed to follow hygiene recommendations and physical distancing except when gardening with members of their household.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- If possible, provide a place for gardeners to wash their hands. If the handwashing station is in a bathroom, it needs to be equipped with running water, liquid hand soap, and paper towels. Bathrooms are required to be cleaned at least twice daily, or as needed.
- Encourage gardeners to bring hand sanitizer with them when gardening. If hands are visibly soiled, hand washing with soap and water is recommended in place of hand sanitizer.
- Members are asked to wash their hands or use alcohol based hand sanitizer before entering and after leaving the garden, and after using shared tools, as feasible.
- All high touch surfaces such as hoses, faucet handles, spigots, shed locks/ handles, and gate locks should be cleaned and disinfected twice daily.

Additional Safe Operating Recommendations

- Gardens should use a sign-in and sign-out system or implement another way to track who is in the garden each day. This may assist Public Health if follow-up with gardeners or other necessary measures are required.
- Gardeners can choose to wear a non-medical mask, as an additional way of covering the mouth and nose to prevent respiratory droplets from contaminating others or landing on surfaces. This does not replace proven measures like physical distancing and proper hand hygiene. More information on the use of non-medical masks and face coverings can be found on the [Public Health Agency of Canada webpage](#).
- Consider removing shared tools and gloves and encouraging 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 before and after using shared tools.
- If cleaning tools, be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Each gardener must wear their own gloves.
- Develop COVID-19 policies using the guidance provided above; communicate to members and ensure members have clearly indicated their agreement to all guidelines before garden access is permitted.

Thank you for helping to keep community gardens healthy and safe!

Additional Resources

- [Sustain Ontario](#) for guidance on how to safely use a community garden during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [Public Health Ontario](#) for fact sheets on how to self-isolate, complete a self-assessment, physical distancing, how to wash your hands and cleaning & disinfection.
- [Halton Region](#) for COVID-19 updates and additional information on protecting yourself and others.

Adapted with permission of Hamilton Public Health