

COVID-19: Guidance for Community Gardens



April 28, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly, and this guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website swpublichealth.ca regularly for updates and additional information. To sign up to receive our newsletter, visit the [partners and professionals page](#) on www.swpublichealth.ca.

On April 25th the Government of Ontario lifted restrictions, allowing community gardens to operate following the guidance of the local Medical Officer of Health. This factsheet provides current guidance from Southwestern Public Health under the advice of Dr. Joyce Lock, Medical Officer of Health.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY GARDENS:

Community gardens play an important role in our food system, providing spaces for residents to grow their own food, increasing their access to healthy foods. Not only as a contributor to food security, gardens also promote a sense of community belonging and an opportunity for residents to be physically active. In this way, community gardens can contribute to good mental health and wellbeing for citizens.

Community gardens are not a recreational space or place for social gatherings. Their sole purpose is for essential food production.

FOR GARDEN COORDINATORS AND GARDEN MANAGERS:

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

- Post signage that restricts access to registered members, staff and volunteers. Nonmembers and visitors should not be permitted to enter. Children should only be brought to the garden on an as needed basis and should be instructed to follow physical distancing and hand hygiene recommendations.

- Place clear visible signage reminding all who enter regarding the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and where to seek assistance if they have symptoms: covid19checkup.ca, SWPH Call Centre 1-800-922-0096 ext. 9 or Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000.
- Use of the garden is only to plant, maintain and harvest food and it prohibits events such as festivals, children's events, and other programming, training or group builds/activities.
- Inform all garden users and plot owners of guidelines prior to allowing access to the garden.
- Post signage reminding users of the rules, including no more than five persons at a time, no sharing of food or personal items and physical distancing requirements.
- Instruct garden users and plot owners to wash their hands before entering and after leaving the garden site.
- Limit garden access to no more than 5 persons at one time. This can be achieved by communicating a work schedule to garden users and plot owners. The work schedule must ensure that [physical distancing](#) can be met and the limit on social gathering can be met.
- Remove or tape off picnic tables and other structures meant for communal seating and gathering.
- If the garden has gate access, consider leaving the gate open during hours of operation so individuals do not have to handle or touch the gate to enter.
- When scheduling times, consider the space between plots and stagger accordingly to maximize the space between gardeners at the time of use and ensure [physical distancing](#) of 2 metres can be maintained.
- Consider using a sign-in/sign-out sheet to track who is in the garden each day.
 - Develop and communicate (to registered members, staff and volunteers) COVID-19 policies/protocols that are specific to the community garden based on the advice.
 - Update a list of current registered members, staff and volunteers and track those who have agreed to participate under the COVID-19 policies and protocols.
- Ensure gardeners are wearing their own gloves and are not sharing and remind them to launder them after each use. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces which are most likely to be contaminated. This would include hoses, door/gate handles, tools, etc. Do not provide shared tools, instead ask that volunteers or plot owners bring their own tools, or if this is not possible assign tools to each person.
- Provide hand sanitizer or hand washing station at garden if possible. Sanitizer should be at least 70% alcohol.
- Set up a sanitizing schedule for equipment and tools using [approved disinfectant](#) and cleaners that are effective for COVID-19:
 - At minimum clean at opening and closing
 - Post sign instructing/reminding individuals to wash hands before and after handling common items like hoses, gates etc.
- Revoke access of any member not following the rules set out for garden safety.

PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR USE OF COMMUNITY GARDENS DURING COVID-19:

- Garden users and plot owners should ensure that they are familiar with all rules and guidelines prior to accessing the garden.
- Individuals should not attend the garden if they are sick. If sick, plot owners should arrange to have someone tend their plot for them until they are feeling better. Prohibit access to anyone who is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or has had close contact of a confirmed case.
- Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling common tools 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.
- At all times maintain physical distancing of 2 metres between yourself and other gardeners.
- Adhere to the garden schedule and do not attend the garden when it is not your scheduled time.
- Avoid touching surfaces such as gates and doorknobs if not necessary and clean hands.
- Bring your own garden tools and sanitize them after use. Wash your gloves after each use.
- Do not bring pets to the garden with you.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth, eyes and face.
- Place all trash in proper garbage receptacle or take garbage with you to dispose of at home
- Wash all produce before consumption according to safe food handling requirements.
- Remember to wear sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat to protect your skin from the sun.



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