

# COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Special Occasion Gatherings

## Guidance for Staying Safe During Special Occasion Gatherings

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Version 2.0

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### Key Points

- Public Health guidance for special occasion gatherings is subject to change based on evolving local epidemiological data.
- During special occasion gatherings, people should restrict close contact to individuals living in their household (i.e., the people they live with).
- Virtual gatherings are the safest way to visit with people outside of your household.
- Both participants and organizers of event gatherings are responsible for adhering to the guidance contained in this document.

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### Guidance

This guidance reflects the current local need for protection from COVID-19. Local epidemiological patterns direct the decisions made as it pertains to special occasion gatherings. With the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation, patterns can change quickly, necessitating amendments or reversal of these guidelines right up until the event date. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website [www.swpublichealth.ca](http://www.swpublichealth.ca) regularly for updates and additional information.

Both participants and organizers of events are responsible for adhering to current social gathering and organized public event restrictions, and ensuring public health advice and measures are followed.

### General Advice on Close Contact

- In alignment with Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Southwestern Public Health advises people to restrict close contact to those individuals living in their household (i.e., the people they live with).
  - Close contact is defined as interaction that does not include the practice of recommended public health measures, such as two (2) metre physical distancing and wearing a face-covering where required or where physical distancing is a challenge.
- Individuals who live alone, including seniors, may consider having exclusive, close contact with another household to mitigate social isolation's negative impacts.
- Maintain two metres of physical distance with everyone else.

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- Wear a face covering when physical distancing is a challenge or where it is mandatory to do so should apply to everyone else. See [www.swpublichealth.ca](http://www.swpublichealth.ca) for information on mandatory face regulations in Ontario.
- Virtual gatherings or events are the safest way to visit or recognize occasions with people outside your household.

## Advice for Gatherings and Events (including Halloween, Remembrance Day, and Ethnocultural Events)

### General Advice:

- Limit close contact with people living in your household.
- Virtual gatherings or events are the safest way to visit or recognize occasions with people outside your household.
- Gatherings or events outdoors are safer than indoors; however, physical distancing of two (2) metres must still be maintained.
- If you have a gathering with people you do not live with physical distancing of two (2) metres must be maintained:
  - Any gatherings must adhere to the measures and restrictions outlined in [O. Reg. 364/20](#).
  - The fewer people you have, the lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

### Other Key Messages:

- It is important to remember that just because you know someone, it does not reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19.
- If you choose to hold or participate in an in-person gathering or event with people outside your household, you should take precautions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission:
  - Stay home if:
    - You have symptoms, even if they are mild or you recently had a negative COVID-19 test;
  - Limit close contacts to your household or the people you live with;
  - Maintain two metres of physical distancing from everyone else;
  - Wear a face-covering indoors and wear one outdoors if physical distancing may not be maintained or if wearing one is required;
  - Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly;
  - Cover your cough;
  - Download the COVID Alert mobile app; and
  - Get tested if you have symptoms compatible with COVID-19, or if you've been advised of exposure by your local public health unit or through the COVID Alert mobile app.

**Refer to Appendix A for advice specific to Halloween, Remembrance Day and other events.**

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## Appendix A: Advice on Gathering and Event Scenarios

### Hosting a gathering, including holiday dinners

At this time, it is strongly advised that you only have close contact with the people you live with, even when celebrating or recognizing occasions when you would typically gather with others. People who live alone may have (mutually exclusive) close contact with one additional household that they trust to prevent feelings of isolation and negative mental health impacts.

Virtual gatherings or events are the safest way to visit or recognize occasions with people outside your household.

If you have a gathering with people you don't live with, physical distancing of two metres should be maintained:

- You cannot have more than 10 people indoors or 25 people outdoors. The fewer people you have, the lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Gatherings or events outdoors are safer than indoors; however, physical distancing of 2 metres must still be maintained.

It is important to remember that just because you know someone, it does not reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Keep following good public health practices.

If you choose to host an in-person gathering:

- Determine how many people can easily maintain physical distancing in the space, without exceeding the gathering limit of 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors.
  - You should keep your gathering as small as possible and use outdoor spaces whenever possible.
- Promote physical distancing, including arranging seating in advance to space household groups appropriately.
- Provide all the necessary supplies, including hand sanitizer, soap and water.
- Plan for how guests will use the washroom to limit people touching the same objects and ensuring it is clean.
- Open windows, if possible.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces.
- Ask guests not to attend if they have symptoms, even if they are mild or recently had a negative COVID-19 test.
- Please make a list of guests attending in case public health needs it for contact tracing.

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- Remind people of public health advice to follow during the event, including physical distancing and wearing a face-covering indoors and wearing one outdoors if physical distancing is not maintained.
- If you choose to serve food or drinks at your gathering, you should:
  - Wash your hands before and frequently during preparation.
  - Avoid buffet-style foodservice and plan how you will physically distance while distributing and cleaning up food.
  - Serve food on individual plates to prevent your guests from passing and touching the same objects.
  - Have everyone wash their hands before and after eating.

If you choose to attend an in-person gathering:

- You should not attend if you have any symptoms, even if they are mild or you recently had a negative COVID-19 test, or if you are in quarantine or self-isolating.
- Limit close contact to the people you live with.
- Always maintain two metres of physical distancing from everyone else.
- Wear a face-covering indoors and wear one outdoors if physical distancing may not be maintained.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer regularly throughout the event.
- Ask in advance what the plan is for using washrooms and providing food or drinks. You should ensure that people are not touching the same objects.
- Consider participating virtually or not attending the event if you are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, including 70 years or older, are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions.

## Celebrating Halloween

To have a safe and happy Halloween:

- Stay home if feeling ill or if you have mild symptoms.
- Only go out with members of your immediate household.
- Only trick or treat outside.
- Both trick or treaters and people handing out candy should wear a face covering:
  - A costume mask is not a substitute for a face covering and should not be worn over a face covering as it may make it difficult to breathe.
  - Consider building your face covering into your or your child's costume.
- Do not congregate or linger at doorsteps. Line up two metres apart if waiting.
  - Avoid high-touch surfaces and objects.
- Whether collecting or handing out treats, wash your hands often and thoroughly or use hand sanitizer:
  - Do not leave treats in a bucket or bowl for children to grab.

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- Consider using tongs or other similar tools to hand out treats.
- Avoid participating in Halloween activities if you are elderly or have other risks for severe COVID-19 disease.

## Recognizing Remembrance Day

- If attending a Remembrance Day memorial event (that is permitted as per [O. Reg. 364/20](#)), remember that it is safest to attend events virtually and likely safer to attend outdoor events than indoor ones.
  - Stay home if you have symptoms, even if they are mild or recently had a negative COVID-19 test.
  - Maintain two metres of physical distancing from anyone you do not live with and limit close contact to your household members.
  - Wear a face-covering indoors and wear one outdoors if physical distancing may not be maintained or is required.
  - Wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.
  - Consider participating virtually or not attending the event if you are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, including 70 years or older, are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions.
- The safer way to sell poppies is with unstaffed boxes (e.g., at checkouts). Members of the public can also donate to the Legion or purchase a digital poppy online.
- If you chose to sell poppies in-person:
  - Wear a face covering;
  - Have hand sanitizer and use it regularly;
  - Wash or sanitize your hands every time after handling cash; and
  - Consider not selling if you are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, including 70 years or older, are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions.

## Having a Play Date or Sleepover

- It is recommended that you only have close contact with the people you live with.
  - It is important to remember that just because you know someone, it does not reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Keep following good public health practices.
  - Virtual visits are a safe option for your kids to see friends they don't live with.
- If you choose to have a play date with other children who are not a part of your household, it is safer to do it outdoors than indoors. In either case:
  - Children and adults should maintain physical distancing of two metres.
  - Playdates should be kept small and adhere to the current gathering limits, up to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors where physical distancing can be maintained.
  - Bring hand sanitizer and use it regularly.
  - Wear a face covering, even in places where they are not required.

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- Have each person or family bring their food and drinks.
  - If you share food, plan for how you will physically distance while distributing and cleaning up food, not sharing utensils or other objects.
- Wash your hands before and after eating.
- Children should not have a sleepover with another child outside of their household, even if that child is in their class at school.