

# COVID-19: Guidance for Community Gardens

April 30, 2020

As of April 25, 2020 the Ontario government is allowing the use of allotment and community gardens for food production, across Ontario, provided that guidelines are followed. Until further notice, community gardens are not a recreational space or place for social gatherings. In-person events, workshops or potlucks are strictly prohibited.

This document provides guidelines from the acting Medical Officer of Health of the Northwestern Health Unit for community garden co-ordinators and community garden members.

This document adds to existing provincial recommendations, which still must be adhered to including:

- No more than 5 people may be gathered at a time.
- Everyone must maintain physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet) unless they are from the same household\*.
- Practice personal preventive measures: hand hygiene; avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth; and cough or sneeze into bent elbow or tissue.

\*Mask use is recommended for use in public when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Because it is essential that community gardens comply with measures to maintain physical distance, mask use in community gardens is not required though can protect others, if used properly.

You should not go to the garden if you:

- Have symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, muscle aches, fatigue, headache, sore throat and/or runny nose). If you have symptoms, call the NWHU to COVID-19 hotline to be referred for testing.
- Have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
- Have been told to self-isolate.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario recommends that anyone over 70 or immune-compromised stay home.

## Communication

- All garden members should be informed of the rules of the garden prior to being allowed entry to the garden.
- Prior to opening the garden, signage must be posted where everyone can see it and should include the following information:
  - Only garden members are allowed to use and to be in the garden.
  - Rules of use: physical distancing, hand hygiene, and no sharing of food or personal items.



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- Do not enter the garden if you are experiencing any symptoms. You must be free of symptoms for 24 hours before entering the garden unless directed differently by the Northwestern Health Unit.
- Advise garden members to monitor their health and to complete a self-assessment (<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>) prior to going to the garden each time. Direct members to stay home if they are sick and to contact the NWHU COVID-19 Hotline to be referred for testing.
- Revoke garden access to any member not following the rules set out for garden safety.

## Scheduling

- Scheduling for garden access should be done to minimize touching of shared surfaces such as shed doors and hose nozzles. To keep up with site work, have a scheduled rotation of members to perform site maintenance duties.
- When scheduling, consider the space between the plots and stagger accordingly to maximize the space between gardeners at the time of use to ensure physical distancing of 2 metres can be maintained.

## Cleaning and Disinfection

Members should be asked to:

- Wash their [hands or use hand sanitizer](#) before entering and after leaving the garden. Gloves are not a substitute for washing hands.
- Take hand sanitizer with them when gardening. Sanitizer should be at least 70% alcohol. If hands are visibly soiled, hand washing is recommended in place of hand sanitizer.
- Take their own garden tools and sanitize them after use; and if using shared tools wash or sanitize hands after use.

Co-ordinators should:

- Set up a sanitizing schedule for touch areas of tools and equipment if they have to be shared using approved [disinfectant and cleaners](#) at minimum at opening and closing.
- Close or block off all non-essential amenities such as picnic tables and benches, when possible.



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## For Garden Members

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Follow all provincial recommendations, and:

- Sanitize or wash hands with soap on entry and exit from the garden.
- Avoid touching surfaces such as gates and doorknobs if not necessary and clean hands upon entering and exiting the garden.
- Take everything you need with you: hand sanitizer, your own tools, and your own gardening gloves.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth, eyes and face.
- Keep trips to and time spent at garden to a minimum (plan ahead!)
- Children should be taken to gardens only on an as-needed basis and should be instructed to follow physical distancing and hygiene recommendations.
- Wash all produce before consumption according to safe food handling requirements.
- Let your co-ordinator know if you need support maintaining your garden.

### Compliance and Enforcement

Non-compliance with these requirements may result in warnings, charges and fines under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. If you have any questions, or are not able to follow the requirements listed above, contact the Northwestern Health Unit at 1-800-830-5978 to discuss.

### For more Information

COVID-19 information is updated weekdays on our website at [www.nwhu.on.ca/covid19](http://www.nwhu.on.ca/covid19).

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for the most up-to-date information.

NWHU COVID-19 Hotline: 1-800-468-2240

### References:

- WECHU Public Health Memo COVID-19 Guidance for Community Gardens
- KFLA Public Health COVID-19 Safe Operating Recommendations for Community Gardens
- HPE Public Health COVID-19 Safe Operating Requirements for Community Gardens



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