



Fall in Love
WITH
Maple

GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING
COVID-19

Sweet Ontario

PURE MAPLE SYRUP



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COVID-19 remains a serious health threat and must continue to be treated as such.

While the number of day-to-day COVID-19 infections in Ontario has decreased significantly over the past several months, low numbers do not guarantee a low risk of becoming infected. Several factors contribute to this concern.

- Highly contagious, potentially more lethal variants are emerging and spreading, increasing the risk of further local or provincial outbreaks.
- COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective against serious illness and death but do not provide 100 percent protection even for those who are fully vaccinated; even those who are fully vaccinated may still become infected and may still transmit the COVID-19 virus.
- Although the majority of Ontarions have received a least one COVID-19 shot, those who have not been vaccinated are substantially more vulnerable to infection.

Although much has been learned about the COVID-19 virus and its' variants since the beginning of the pandemic, many uncertainties remain. However, there is strong science-based evidence regarding transmission routes of the virus.

- Airborne respiratory droplet transmission from infected individuals coughing, sneezing, laughing, singing, shouting or talking during close contact (within 2 metres) has been confirmed as a primary source of transmission by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).
- Recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) studies suggest that virus-bearing aerosols that stay in the air for minutes to hours play a more significant role in the transmission of the COVID-19 virus than was previous believed.
- Peer reviewed scientific studies indicate infection by droplets carried to the mouth and/or nose by hands touching contaminated surfaces is rare, but not nonexistent.
- Those infected with the COVID-19 virus may have symptoms ranging from very serious, to mild, to few, or no symptoms. The virus can be spread by infected individuals who have mild symptoms, or who have not yet or who may never develop symptoms.

There continues to be no evidence the COVID-19 virus is transmitted by food.

Key risk factors for COVID-19 transmission include:

- Prolonged exposure
- Close proximity
- Crowded places
- Closed indoor spaces
- Forceful exhalation (activities that cause people to breathe more deeply)



Health experts agree that vaccine alone won't stop community transmission; precautionary practices must continue even for those who are fully vaccinated.

Since you do not know which visitors to your maple operation have been vaccinated and which have not, use an abundance of caution when dealing with all guests. This requires that you remain proactive in your approach to protecting the health of yourself and your family, as well as the health of your workers and your guests. To do so, every producer should create a COVID-19 plan that includes the measures and procedures described below. Visible health measures such as mandatory masks, social distancing, ready access to sanitizers, among other things, will help inspire confidence among visitors and staff that their health is being protected. Your plan must be flexible to accommodate ongoing changes to provincial and local health unit guidelines and requirements. For example, changes to government mandated requirements during phased in re-openings must be anticipated and provisions made to incorporate these changes into your plan as they come into effect.

No single preventive measure by itself can adequately limit the risk of infection of COVID-19. To effectively address the risk factors, a combination of the preventive measures described below must be implemented and maintained.



PRE-EVENT PREPARATION

Communicate with Customers

Prepare your customers for what to expect before they visit your maple operation.

- Clearly communicate what you are offering (e.g. bush hikes, bush wagon tours, sugarhouse tours, etc.).
- Use your website and/or social media and/or your customer database to let customers know the precautions that you're taking to protect their health and safety. Regularly reinforce this message.
- Clearly describe your visitor policies in communications with prospective visitors. Reinforce those policies with signage prominently posted in visitor areas. Policies may include:
 - *Those who are not feeling well (e.g. temperature greater than 38°C, cough, worsening chronic cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing), have tested positive for COVID-19, have come into close contact with someone with COVID-19 symptoms or a confirmed case of COVID-19, or have travelled outside Canada in the past 14 days are asked to stay home. You may also note that illness symptoms customarily associated with COVID-19 may not apply to newly discovered COVID-19 variants of concern. Even those fully vaccinated must treat symptoms seriously, as a small percentage may still get and transmit the virus.*
 - *Include the link to the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Customer Screening Tool to assist prospective visitors in self-assessing their health status. The link is included in the References at the end of this document.*
 - *Mask wearing is required in all indoor areas; outdoor use of masks is optional.*
 - *Social distancing must be practiced in all indoor areas.*
 - *Hand sanitizers are to be used frequently.*
 - *Pets are not allowed.*
- If you have an employee COVID-19 policy, post it on your website/social media site and prominently throughout visitor areas.
- Encourage customers to come in groups of the size and makeup mandated by local and provincial restrictions in place at the time of the event.

CREATE/POST SIGNAGE

OMSPA has created several signs that can be downloaded and printed from the OMSPA website. Many local health units and municipalities are also sources of signage. A list of health units may be accessed through the site included in the References section at the end of this document.

Consider these poster subjects.

- the symptoms of COVID-19 (see customer screening tool in References) along with a clear statement that customers/employees are not to enter if they're experiencing any of these symptoms
- a warning that those who appear ill or display COVID-19 symptoms will be asked to leave
- how COVID-19 spreads
- the dos and don'ts of wearing a mask
- physical distancing
- correct hand washing method
- coughing and sneezing etiquette

TRAIN STAFF

Staff includes every individual involved in event-related activities regardless of whether they are family members, volunteers or employees.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, employers are required to maintain a safe workplace and to take reasonable measures to ensure employee safety. In the instance of COVID-19, "reasonable measures" has been interpreted to mean following public health advice, recommendations and instructions for all the workers regardless of whether they have been vaccinated or unvaccinated.

Therefore, worker training should include:

- Informing staff of measures that have been or will be implemented to protect them and others from contracting the COVID-19 virus. (e.g. screening, physical distancing, use of masks/face coverings/other PPE, hand hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting, illness policy).
- Instructing employees on the protocols for each preventive measure you have developed (e.g. the correct techniques for hand washing, how to put on a mask, wear it and remove it safely, new cleaning and disinfecting procedures and frequency, etc.)
- Stressing that how they conduct themselves often influences customer confidence and buying decisions now and in the future.
- Asking each employee/volunteer to agree to and sign your employer COVID-19 policy, if you have one. An example policy is posted on the OMSPA website.
- Daily screening options.

SCREEN STAFF

In Ontario, there is no legislation that makes COVID-19 vaccination mandatory.

Consensus in the legal community is that requiring employees to be vaccinated or to disclose their vaccine status violates Canadian human and privacy rights, although there may be exceptions in special circumstances. This is a complex and quickly changing area and should be approached with caution. Employers contemplating either requirement for their staff or customers should seek legal advice.

The most prudent strategy is to assume no one has been vaccinated and to proceed in an appropriate manner.

Where employees voluntarily disclose their vaccination status, employers are legally obligated to treat this information as confidential. It cannot be divulged to other employees, customers or anyone else who may ask. At the same time, when employee vaccination status is known, employers cannot discriminate against, discipline or terminate workers who have not been vaccinated.

Precautionary staff screening measures must remain in place.

- Several screening methods may be used
 - *In person, before beginning work*
 - *Questionnaire using pen and paper (a link to the screening tool is included in the References and a sample questionnaire is posted on the OMSPA website).*
 - *An assigned person asks questions directly and records answers.*
 - *Remotely*
 - *Via mobile app (<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>).*
 - *Via telephone.*
 - *Honour system*
 - *Employee declares themselves illness-free and fit to work.*
- Those individuals who do not pass the screening process may not enter the building and must go home immediately.
- Management will monitor staff regularly for health issues. Those who are sick or have signs of illness (e.g. fever, coughing, runny nose, tiredness, shortness of breath) will be sent home immediately and not be permitted to return until after self-isolating and/or receiving a negative COVID-19 test result.
- Bar symptomatic persons from the workplace; before being allowed to return, they must self-isolate for 10 days and provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test.
- Those in close contact with someone with symptoms must self-isolate at home for 14 days.
- Inform others who may have been exposed to someone with symptoms or a COVID-19 infection.



ENHANCE BUILDING AIR FLOW AND VENTILATION

As noted above, CDC studies indicate COVID-19 virus aerosols can remain suspended for extended periods in poorly ventilated indoor areas where air is circulated unfiltered and untreated. Accumulation of sufficient quantities may cause infection via inhalation.

- Draw in as much fresh air as possible from outside to decrease the concentration of COVID-19 aerosols that may be suspended in the air.
 - *Open or partially open windows and doors, whenever possible.*
 - *Use portable air cleaners/purifiers in retail areas where ventilation is difficult.*
 - *Reduce recirculation of HVAC systems/maintain air filtration systems; avoid recirculating air as much as possible.*
 - *Continue air exchange after working hours.*

INSTALL HAND SANITATION STATIONS

- Provide easy access to 70 to 90 percent alcohol content hand sanitizer placed in multiple locations throughout the building including at the entrance, exit, retail check out, washroom, etc. A link to approved hand sanitizers may be found in the References section at the end of this document.
- Check hand sanitizer container levels frequently to ensure its' availability at all times.
- Remember, effectiveness of hand sanitizers is greatly reduced when applied to dirty hands.

HAVE ADEQUATE SUPPLIES

- Ensure there is an adequate supply of hand soap/hand sanitizers/cleaners/sanitizers/disinfectants on hand.
- Confirm there is an adequate supply of other hygiene-related supplies (e.g. garbage bags, paper towels, etc.).

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

As much as possible, conduct activities outside where constantly moving fresh air disperses virus bearing droplets and aerosols.

PARKING

- To direct vehicle and customer traffic flow, assign staff and/or use pylons, flags, ropes, etc. along with appropriate signage.
- Based on expected visitor numbers, consider creating an overflow parking area that will not impede on-site movement of vehicles and pedestrians or public roadway movement of vehicles.

LINEUPS

- To manage anticipated lineups, install visual markers (e.g. signage, arrows, pylons, flags, rope barriers) that encourage single file lineups and physical distancing, even for lineups that are outside.
- Where expected visitor numbers warrant, consider separate lineups for each individual activity (e.g. a lineup for bush hikes, another for sugarhouse tours, another for retail display/sales, etc.).
- To engage customers while they're waiting in line, consider installing posters describing available products, the syrup making process, the history of your farm, etc. Space these posters at least two metres apart to encourage physical distancing.

BUSH TOURS/HIKES

- Offer self-guided bush hikes where visitors walk on trails through the bush rather than ride on wagons.
 - *Appointments will assist in management of numbers and timing.*
 - *A circular route that minimizes passing is ideal.*
 - *Install directional signage along the route.*
 - *Consider explanatory signs of the sap gathering process or points of interest along the route.*
 - *Consider offering package deals - the hike plus a maple product; have the product ready for curbside pickup when the customer returns from their hike.*
- If you offer wagon tours:
 - *Where warranted, consider using a booking app to manage visitor numbers and timing.*
 - *Maintain group size and makeup mandated by current provincial and/or local requirements.*
 - *Limit to number of passengers per wagon to facilitate physical distancing.*
 - *Have hand sanitizer available on wagons.*
 - *Sanitize high touch surfaces between each trip.*

OUTDOOR RETAIL AREA

- If weather permits, consider creating an outdoor retail display, payment and product pick-up area.

INDOORS

Indoor Retail Area

- Face coverings must be worn at all times in all indoor areas.
- Local health units or provincial requirements may mandate a percentage capacity of indoor retail areas.
 - *Use the Retail Council of Canada's calculation method to determine store occupancy limits that maintain physical distancing. Simply determine the actual sales floor area, then divide that number by an allowance of 4 square metres (43 square feet) per customer.*
 - *For example, if your retail area is 20 X 20 feet or 6.1 X 6.1 metres:*

Total retail sales area	20 ft X 20 ft = 400 ft ²	6.1 m X 6.1 m = 37.2 m ²
Deduct fixtures on sales floor (e.g. displays, checkout, etc.)	53 ft ² (a guesstimate for calculation purposes only)	5.2 m ²
Actual sales floor area	400 ft ² - 53 ft ² = 347 ft ²	37.2 m ² - 5.2 m ² = 32 m ²
Calculate capacity	347 ft ² ÷ 43 ft ² = 8	32 m ² ÷ 4 m ² = 8
Therefore, 100% capacity = 8 customers; 50% = 4 customers; 25% = 2 customers		

- Determine how the allowed in-store customer capacity will be enforced.
 - *Post prominent signage at the entrance indicating the maximum number of customers allowed in the store at any given time.*
 - *Consider posting a "greeter" at the door to manage entry/control lineups.*
- Where possible, create clearly marked entrance and exit doors.
- Install visual markers (e.g. arrows taped on the floor, pylons, flags, rope barriers, signs) to encourage single line/physical distancing while shopping and while waiting to make payment. This may require modification of displays or other features in the store.
- Remove distractions that encourage congregating/lingering. To that end, eliminate product sampling in the interior retail area.
- Well-spaced exterior sampling areas may be a sampling option. However, to keep your customers safe, the logistics and extra staffing required to do so must be weighed against potential benefits.
- Rather than self-serve, consider serving customers from behind barriers (e.g. a table or plexiglass between the product display and the customer).
- Where self-serve is used, try not to handle the product when it is presented at the payment area.
- Install physical barriers at the point of sale (e.g. plexiglass) in retail areas
 - *The height should be 30 cm (12") higher than the mid-point of between the ears if the tallest person on either side of the barrier*
 - *The width should be as wide as the surface will allow*
 - *The opening at the surface level should be as small as possible and off-centre*



RECEIVING PAYMENT

Strive to minimize the number of interactions between staff and customers.

- When possible, use alternate methods of ordering/advance payment (e.g. via phone, website).
- In addition to credit cards, consider e-transfer as an option for prepaid orders.
- For in-person prepaid order pickup, consider the option of curbside pickup so that customers are not required to exit their vehicles. Alternately, place prepaid orders in an area where customers can access their order while maintaining a two-metre distance from other customers and staff.
- Where practical, mail or courier delivery may be offered for prepaid orders.
- For on-site payment, encourage a single payer while the remaining members of the group exit the building.
- For on-site payment, explore options for electronic payment by installing mobile no touch or tap debit card readers. Try to avoid electronic payment devices that require entry of a PIN. There are several mobile card reader options for contactless payment that operate off your cell phone. Terminals may be purchased or rented.
- If receiving payment by cash, wash hands (or sanitize with an alcohol-based sanitizer) immediately after handling the cash. Disposable gloves may be worn to handle cash, but hand washing/hand sanitation is often more hygienic than wearing gloves.
- Encourage staff to physical distance from customers.
- Encourage staff to be friendly and sincere, but firm, with rule breakers.

SUGARHOUSE TOURS

As the sugarhouse is an indoor area, the same capacity and traffic flow requirements that apply to the indoor retail area also apply to the sugarhouse.

DAILY INDOOR CLEANING/SANITIZING/DISINFECTING

Research suggests that the COVID-19 virus may live on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days depending on the temperature, the type of surface and the humidity of the environment. Surfaces frequently touched with hands are most likely to become contaminated.

Although scientists have downgraded the risk of transfer of the virus to the nose and mouth by hands that touched contaminated hard surfaces, the possibility of transmission by this route remains. Therefore, daily cleaning and sanitation remains an important component of your COVID-19 plan.

- Identify high touch areas and other areas (e.g. washrooms) that require enhanced cleaning/ sanitation/disinfection.
- Review your cleaning/disinfection schedule/products/instructions for cleaning/ disinfecting high touch and other areas of potential contamination.
- Keep in mind:
 - *Cleaning with soap/detergent and water will decrease the number of bacteria on hard surfaces but will not kill them all. This does not minimize the need for a disciplined cleaning program.*
 - *Sanitizers kill bacteria, but not viruses (approved sanitizers display a PCP registration number on their containers).*
 - *Disinfectants kill both bacteria and viruses on hard surfaces (approved hard surface disinfectants carry an eight-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN)).*
 - *There is a link to a searchable database of approved sanitizers and disinfectants in the References section at the end of this document.*
 - *No matter the product, always follow label directions.*
- Frequently and visibly clean and disinfect customer high touch surfaces (e.g. wipe down debit/credit card terminals in front of the customer, clean tables, doorknobs, handrails and other high touch surfaces consistently).
- Clean and disinfect washrooms often; post cleaning record prominently.
- Ensure that soap, single use paper towels and toilet paper in washrooms are adequately stocked at all times and that waste containers are emptied regularly to prevent overflow.
- Post signs emphasizing the importance of thorough hand washing.

RESOURCES

COVID-19 public health measures and advice

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/public-health-measures>

Develop your COVID-19 workplace safety plan

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/develop-your-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan>

Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/resources-prevent-covid-19-workplace>

COVID-19 safety checklist for workplaces

<https://files.ontario.ca/mltsd-covid-safety-checklist-workplaces-en-2021-01-19.pdf>

Ministry of Health COVID-19 Customer Screening Tool

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/screening/customer/>

Ministry of Health COVID-19 Worker and Employee Screening Tool

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/screening/worker/>

List of Public Health Units in Ontario

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx>

Take A Self-Assessment – COVID-19

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>

Hard surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers (COVID-19);

List of disinfectants with evidence for use against COVID-19

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>

Using masks in the workplace

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/using-masks-workplace>

Cleaning and disinfecting public spaces during Covid-19

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/cleaning-disinfecting-public-spaces.html>

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Prevention and risks

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html>

Working with farm operators to stop the spread of COVID-19 on farms

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/working-farm-operators-stop-spread-covid-19-farms>

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services Guidance on Health and Safety for Agricultural Workers during COVID-19

<https://www.wsps.ca/wsps/media/site/resources/downloads/covid-19-agricultural-workers-health-and-safety-guidance.pdf?ext=.pdf>

Vaccinated against COVID-19? What does it mean to me?

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/awareness-resources/vaccinated-against-covid-19-public-health-measures.html>