

COVID-19

Multi-unit Residential Buildings

This document provides property owners/managers of multi-unit residential buildings, and their staff, with infection prevention and control guidance.

Multi-unit residential buildings bring many people together within the same building. Those residents may find it difficult to avoid contact with their neighbours due to access to common areas and shared facilities.

Building managers have a legal and ethical responsibility to implement measures to lower the risk of disease transmission to their residents and employees.

Lambton Public Health provides advice based on best practices and available evidence to protect the health of employees and the community.

Building managers are responsible for worker safety, i.e. Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act, and other legislation.

What is COVID - 19?

COVID-19 is an infection caused by a new type of coronavirus. It can cause acute respiratory illness in humans. It spreads through contact with water droplets when a person coughs or sneezes.

Maintenance services at multi-unit residential buildings

[Ontario's list of essential workplaces](#) considers maintenance services, including urgent repair to maintain the safety, security, sanitation and essential operation of residential properties and buildings an essential service.

Infection prevention recommendations

Management cannot know whether infected individuals are in the building. Individuals without symptoms may not know themselves, and symptomatic individuals have no duty to self-report to building management.

Changes to sanitation, building operation and health communication can help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19. It's important to initiate precautions such as:

Cleaning/disinfecting of common areas

Frequently touched surfaces are areas most likely to be contaminated. Ensure staff clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces in common areas such as:

- enter phones
- elevator panels and buttons
- light switches
- indoor and outdoor hand railings
- mailboxes
- door knobs and handles
- recycling/garbage chute handles
- laundry machines

Clean and disinfect these surfaces at least twice a day and when visibly dirty.

- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers placed in high traffic areas may be useful, only if they can be kept stocked because of short supply.
- Use only disinfectants with an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN). The number given by Health Canada confirms approved use in Canada. Health Canada has [a list](#) of acceptable disinfectants. Check the expiry date; follow instructions.
- There are no requirements for custodial staff to wear personal protective equipment, except for gloves when handling disinfectants.
- Wipes, for cleaning and disinfection, are preferred for surfaces that are not heavily soiled. If wipes or paper towels are not available, reusable rags can be used. After, wash rags in hot water (60°C-90°C) with regular soap.

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- To reduce the risk of making the virus airborne, cleaners should avoid dusting or sweeping. Use damp cloths or paper towels and wet mopping.
- Soft surfaces, such as upholstered furniture and curtains, can be steam cleaned, or isolated for 72 hours and then cleaned normally.

In Phase 3, most indoor communal areas such as recreation rooms, public kitchens, party rooms, lounges, and fitness rooms can open; saunas and steam rooms must remain closed. Pools and spas can open if they are approved to operate by Lambton Public Health at 50% their usual capacity with physical distancing measures in place. Outdoor patios may open if they have open walls, physical distancing between tables and chairs, and are able to be cleaned regularly.

As always, essential amenities such as elevators, shared laundries, and in some cases washrooms remain open.

- **Elevators:** Assess elevators for size How many can fit inside (with a 2-metre distance between people)? Post the allowed number of occupants inside and outside the elevator.
- **Laundry rooms:** You may need to limit the numbers in the laundry room to ensure physical distancing. Schedules may be necessary, if busy.
- **Washrooms in common areas:** They may or may not be considered necessary. If common washrooms remain open, cleaning and disinfecting are required. Some urinals and sink basins may need to be decommissioned (i.e. taped off) if 2 m spacing cannot be maintained in the current set up.
 - Keep them well stocked with soap and paper towel.
 - Advise users to flush the toilet with the lid down where possible.

Building ventilation

- No changes to building ventilation, temperature and humidity are required at this time.

- Ensure mechanical ventilation is operating properly to supply required design ventilation rates.
- Ensure corridor pressurization (if in place) is sufficient to prevent air from units flowing into corridors.
- Ensure filters are clean.
- Within individual units, it is recommended to increase natural ventilation (i.e. opening a window if weather permits) to lessen the risk of transmission within the household.

Other precautions

- All deliveries should be left in the lobby for pickup or outside apartment doors.
- All trash cans, both outdoor and lobby wastebaskets, should have working lids and kept closed.
- Building operators should encourage staff to stay at home if sick. Sick employees can spread the infection to residents. Management should implement flexible sick leave policies.
- Building operators should encourage staff to maintain good personal hygiene practices, such as hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, not touching their faces, etc.
- If possible, postpone service visits. If it can't wait, staff should avoid close contact with guests or residents by conducting work in a separate room or at least two metres away from guest or resident.
 - After each visit, staff should wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Health Messaging

It is important to reinforce the health messaging recommended by public health. Lambton Public Health has printable resources you can post.

Topics include:

- [physical distancing](#)
- [hand washing](#)
- [self-isolation](#)

For resources visit: [Lambton Public Health](#).