

Gathering limit changes, other restrictions eased – June 26

Messages:

- There have been no new cases of COVID-19 since June 9 and we have no active cases, thanks to Nova Scotians following public health protocols.
- Starting June 26, restaurants, licensed liquor establishments, and private campgrounds can operate at 100% capacity, public pools can reopen, and residents of homes funded by disability support programs can resume going out into their communities.
- Starting July 3, we are increasing gathering limits for certain events if they are run by a recognized business or organization.
- Dr Strang now recommends that all Nova Scotians wear a non-medical mask in situations where distancing may not be able to be kept, such as in stores, on public transit, or at gatherings. The exceptions are children under two or anyone who has a medical reason for not wearing a mask.
- Reopening the economy and society means increasing risk, so it's more important than ever to follow core measures of physical distancing as much as possible, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, staying home if you are sick, and wearing a non-medical mask when you're in places where physical distancing is difficult.

Q&As

What are the changes?

We are now recommending that all Nova Scotians wear a non-medical mask in situations where distancing may not be able to be kept, such as in stores, on public transit, or at gatherings. The exceptions are children under two or anyone who has a medical reason for not wearing a mask.

- Effective June 26:
 - Restaurants and licensed liquor establishments can operate at 100% capacity, while maintaining appropriate distancing between tables, and serve patrons until midnight. Patrons must leave by 1:00 a.m. These businesses must continue to follow their sector plans.
 - Private campgrounds can operate at 100% capacity. They must continue to follow their sector plan.
 - Public pools can reopen with physical distancing for lane swimming and aquafit classes, and one or more groups of 10 for other activities based on pool size. They must follow the Nova Scotia Lifesaving Society plan for change rooms and washrooms.
 - People living in homes funded by disability support programs can resume going out into their communities, although it may take time for homes to make arrangements

- Effective July 3:
 - Gathering limits increase for the following events when they are run by a recognized business or organization
 - social events
 - arts and culture events
 - sports and physical activity
 - weddings and funerals, and other faith gatherings
 - festivals
 - special events
 - These outdoor events can have 250 people, and indoor events can have 50% of capacity to a maximum of 200 people.
 - When these types of events are NOT run by a recognized business or organization, they are limited to 50. Sport practices also continue to be limited to 50.
 - Physical distancing is still required in all these scenarios, except among people in the same household or social group of 10.

Why are you making these changes now?

Nova Scotia has had no new cases since June 9 and no active cases. We're in good shape. That said, as we reopen the economy and society, we must remain cautious and vigilant and continue to practice core public health measures like good hand hygiene, cough etiquette, physical distancing, and wearing a non-medical mask in places like stores and public transit where physical distancing is difficult. This is part of our new normal of living with COVID 19.

Why are you letting restaurants and bars operate at full capacity and serve patrons until midnight? Doesn't this increase risk?

Restaurants and liquor licensed establishments cannot have parties larger than 10 and must still ensure physical distancing between them. They must continue to follow their sector plan to minimize the risks.

Will there still be family household bubbles?

No, the ability to gather in close social groups of up to 10 without physical distancing replaces the concept of the family household bubble. People should carefully choose their close social group of 10 and try to keep it consistent. People need to make decisions that they are comfortable with and should consider some key things when joining groups of 10 [noted below].

Why is there a higher gathering limit if the event is run by a recognized business or organization?

We're allowing more people in these cases because the recognized business or organization takes on responsibility for ensuring the public health measures are followed. That helps manage risk and keep people safe.

How do people know what is considered a recognized business or organization?

People have to use common sense. For example, a hotel is a recognized business that can host events like fundraisers or weddings in its ballrooms. A church is a recognized organization that can host faith gatherings of various types, as well as weddings and funerals. A theatre is a recognized business that can host performances.

Can someone call themselves a wedding planner just for one family wedding in order to have the bigger limit?

They could if they want to take on full responsibility for ensuring the public health measures are followed. They would also have to follow business and tax laws.

If I rent a venue but do all the work myself for the event, which gathering limit applies?

If you are not a recognized business or organization, then the limit of 50 applies.

Does an event venue have to follow the sector plans for restaurants and bars?

If the venue holds a permanent food establishment permit, it must follow the RANS reopening plan. For licensed events serving alcohol, the protocols for licensed establishments must be followed, as outlined in the public health order. There can be no food service or liquor sales after midnight and patrons/guests must leave by 1 am.

Does the gathering limit include the workers at the event?

No, they are in their workplace which is not subject to the gathering limit. However, if the space is too small for physical distancing, such as a kitchen in a firehall, then there can be no more than 10 workers in the space at a time and they must practice physical distancing as much as possible.

Where can I get more information about running a community event safely?

We have added guidelines to the Reopening Nova Scotia website. They will help you figure out how to make the public health measures work in your own scenarios (<https://novascotia.ca/reopening-nova-scotia/prevention-plans/#sector-plans>). There are also other resources at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/resources/>.

Does the gathering limit apply to my retail business/office workplace, etc?

The gathering limits of 250 outdoors or 50% of capacity up to 200 indoors applies when a recognized businesses or organization hosts a social event, arts and culture event, faith-based gathering, or wedding or funeral. Otherwise, gathering limits do not apply to businesses.

Businesses and workplaces need to ensure employees and customers can maintain 2 metres/6 feet physical distance. So the number of people in the space will vary from business to business. If your space is too small for physical distancing, then you can have no more than 10 clients or customers on the premises at a time.

My business rents a room for weddings and parties and our maximum capacity is 300. Since the indoor limit is 200, can I have 100 guests in that room?

No, the order allows gatherings of 50% of capacity up to a maximum of 200 people with physical distancing. So 50% of your capacity is 150 people.

My business rents a room for weddings and parties and our maximum is 500. Since the limit is 50% of capacity, can I have 250 guests in that room?

No, the order allows gatherings of 50% of capacity up to a maximum of 200 people with physical distancing. While 50% of your capacity is 250 people, you can only have a maximum of 200.

How do the new gathering limits affect restaurants? Can they have 200 people indoors now?

The gathering limits of 250 outdoors or 50% of capacity up to a maximum of 200 indoors applies when a recognized businesses or organization hosts a social event, arts and culture event, faith-based gathering, or wedding or funeral. Otherwise, gathering limits do not apply to businesses.

Restaurants can now operate at 100% capacity as long they maintain a minimum physical distance of 2 metres (6 feet) or a physical barrier between tables, booths and single seats, and there are no single groups of diners greater than 10.

Before, up to 10 people from the same household or family household bubble could dine together. Now, up to 10 people from the same household or group of 10 people can dine together.

How can restaurants operate at full capacity if they have to ensure physical distancing?

We are not allowing restaurants (or liquor licensed establishments) to return to normal capacity. We're allowing them to operate at 100% capacity with physical distancing. For some, that may mean having fewer tables than normal. It depends on how much space they have to work with and what measures they choose to put in place.

If my business is too small for physical distancing, does the group of 10 apply?

No, the group of 10 is meant for closer social interaction between families and friends. This group of up to 10 people can be closer than 2 metres/6 feet. We strongly encourage people to stick with the same group of 10 rather than switching the people in the group.

This is different from the rule for a business that is too small for physical distancing. These businesses can have no more than 10 clients or customers on the premises at a time and they must do their best to be physically distanced.

Can child care centres and day camps now have 200 indoors/250 outdoors?

Gathering limits do not apply to child care centres or day camps. They can operate up to full capacity as long as they can follow the guidelines for their sectors.

In day camps, children must be in groups of no more than 10 and the groups must stay 2 metres/6 feet apart. There can be closer contact within each group of 10.

Can there be 250 people at a playground? Can 10 kids be in close contact at a playground?

The gathering limits do not apply to people going to parks, beaches, trails, playgrounds, etc for recreation.

If people form a group of 10, we strongly encourage them to stick with the same group rather than switching the people in the group. If you join more than one group, you should limit how many you join. People also need to make decisions that they are comfortable with [noted below].

If a group of 10 including parents/guardians and children go to a playground, they can be in close contact with each other but they would have to stay 2 metres/6 feet away from other people and groups. If 10 children arrive at a playground, they should not spontaneously form a group.

Can closer contact activities (like therapy horse riding, tutoring, music lessons, etc) resume?

Yes, as long as the group doing the activity together is no larger than 10 people. You should try to stick to the same group of 10. That said, people need to make decisions that they are comfortable with and should consider some key things when joining groups of 10 [noted below].

For faith gatherings, is it the gathering limit for the congregation plus the officiant and others involved in the service?

It is 50% of capacity up to 200 indoors or 250 outdoors total for faith gatherings, including the officiant and others involved in the service.

Which limit applies to playing sports? Can sports teams now play games like soccer, basketball, etc?

The gathering limit of 50 continues to apply to sports practices but physical distancing is still required. Sports teams can continue skill development activities with up to 50 people, but they can't play a game that involves getting closer than 2 metres/6 feet.

Groups of 10 can practice with close contact, but those groups of 10 should be the same for each practice if possible. Most sports games cannot yet be played as they traditionally would because they generally require more than 10 players.

If a recognized business or organization is hosting a sports event, they can have 50% of capacity up to 200 indoors or 250 outdoors. However, most sports that draw spectators need more than 10 players in close contact to play a game in the traditional way. This isn't allowed yet, so recognized businesses/organizations may not feel it is practical to host events yet.

For sports like kids at a soccer practice, is it 50 people on the field plus 50 parents/spectators?

No, the gathering of 50 includes the players, coaches, and parents/parents.

Does the gathering limit apply to indoor or outdoor fitness classes?

Fitness classes are not subject to the gathering limit. They must follow guidelines for the fitness industry. There's a link to the guidelines here: <https://novascotia.ca/reopening-nova-scotia/prevention-plans/> (Note: this link does not work inside the government firewall, but it does work outside it.)

What about sports teams using large fitness facilities for practices?

We are treating fitness facilities like businesses, whether they are for profit or not. So the gathering limit of 50 does not apply. Instead, they must have a plan to control numbers and ensure social distancing, among other things.

However, if a sports team rents the soccer field or the gymnasium at a fitness facility or the hockey rink, that team is subject to the gathering limit of 50.

How many people are allowed to be in a pool? Can a big outdoor pool have 250? What other rules are there for pools?

The gathering limit does not apply to pools. Facilities need to determine how they can ensure physical distancing for lane swimming and aquafit classes, which may mean they set a limit on the number of people.

Other activities like open swims and swimming lessons can happen in groups of 10 without physical distancing, while keeping the groups 2 metres/6 feet apart.

Pools must have a plan for how they will address public health protocols, and must follow the Nova Scotia Lifesaving Society plan for washrooms and change rooms.

Can groups of 10 do water-based sports in a pool like diving, synchronized swimming, water polo?

Yes, much like having groups of 10 doing skill development on a soccer field, there can be groups of 10 doing these types of sports in a pool. The number of groups depends on the size of the pool, and groups must stay 2 metres/6 feet apart.

For an outdoor arts and culture performance, could there be 250 people in the audience or does that have to include the performers?

The performers would be in addition to the 250 people in the audience.

Note if it's a business giving the performance, the people involved in the production are in their workplace. So they are not subject to the gathering limit but must maintain physical distance from everyone. (If the workplace is not big enough for physical distancing, they can have no more than 10.)

Can 10 actors or musicians form group so that they can perform without physical distancing?

In theory, yes they can but we discourage that because each of them is likely to be in another group with people from their own families or social circles.

Can the audience include some groups of 10 who sit together but are physically distanced from the rest?

Yes, people in the same household can sit together, and people in a close social group of 10 can sit together, with these groups staying 2 metres/6 feet away from others.

Could people (including strangers) arrive at an event like a concert or church service or bingo and form into groups of 10 to sit together instead of everyone sitting 2 metres apart?

In theory, they could as long as all the groups of 10 are 2 metres/6 feet apart. However, we discourage people from spontaneously forming groups of 10. People should consider some key things when choosing who to join in a group of 10 [noted below] and try to stick with a consistent group.

Could organizers of a concert or church service or bingo set up seating in groups of 10 since physical distancing with that size group isn't required?

Businesses and organizations should not set up seating for groups of 10 and randomly seat people together. If you're hosting a concert or a church service or a bingo, you should accommodate people who have formed a group of 10, but you also need to accommodate people who are not in a group of 10 or who are in a smaller group.

Does a group of 10 have to be planned or can it be spontaneous? Can 10 people get in an elevator, for example? In a boardroom at the office?

The group of 10 is meant for social purposes, not for things like elevators, meeting rooms, or spontaneous get togethers. You should try to stick to the same people in your group of 10. People also need to make decisions that they are comfortable with and should consider some key things when joining groups of 10 [noted below].

Does this mean people can carpool again without worrying about physical distancing?

Yes, although people should consider some key things when choosing who to join in a group of 10 (or likely less in a vehicle) [noted below]

Do these changes have any impact on official graduation ceremonies or community graduation celebrations?

No, there are specific rules for those events that are not affected by the changes to the gathering limits. Graduates must arrive in a vehicle with only their immediate family, including parents, step-parents, grand and step-grandparents, siblings and step-siblings, aunts and uncles.

How will the changes affect visitors to LTC facilities, residential homes, and hospitals?

The changes to the gathering limit have no impact on visitor restrictions in LTC facilities, residential homes, and hospitals. Visitor restrictions to these places have eased somewhat, but are still in place.

With residents of homes funded by disability support programs now able to go out into the community, are people also allowed to visit?

Yes, visitor restrictions had already been lifted. These homes have similar conditions as LTC facilities for visiting.

Isn't it risky to gather with different groups of 10 people?

We strongly encourage people to stick with the same close social group of 10 rather than switching the people in the group. If people do have more than one group they should limit the number of close social groups that they join. People also need to make decisions that they are comfortable with.

There are some key questions you should consider when choosing who to join in a close social group of up to 10:

- Is anyone at higher risk – 65 or older, especially with underlying health conditions, chronic disease, or compromised immune systems?
- Does anyone have frequent contact with the general public as part of their job or a higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19?
- Is anyone sick or showing symptoms that could be COVID-19?

Are there other things you can do to keep your close social group of 10 safe?

- Follow basic public health measures:
 - If you are unwell, stay home
 - Practice good hand hygiene
 - Cough/sneeze into your elbow, not your hand
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth without washing hands first
- Try to keep the same people in your group of 10 – the more changes there are, the greater risk of spreading COVID-19
- Understand who is at high-risk/vulnerable and continue to protect them
- Understand your own risk/vulnerability and consider who you are joining a group with
- Maintain physical distancing with anyone outside of your group and between groups
- Consider physical distancing within your group for activities that increase risk (e.g. singing)
- Don't have people in your group who should be self isolating for 14 days after having been outside Nova Scotia
- Consider using non-medical masks, especially if there are people in your group who are at higher risk

- Avoid sharing food and drinks within your group (e.g. shared bowls with dips, shared utensils, etc).