

Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

Nature Centre COVID-19 Staff, Volunteer, Visitor, Event & Rental Policy

Approved January 10, 2023

This staff/volunteer/visitor policy is aimed at reducing the risk of transmission of Covid-19 based on guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the BC Centre for Disease Control, Public Health Office (PHO), Worksafe BC, the BC and Recreation and Parks Sector (BCRPA) and the interdisciplinary BC Covid-19 modelling group, which includes experts in epidemiology, mathematics, and data analysis from UBC, SFU, and UVic with support from the Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences.

How Covid spreads

COVID-19 spreads from an infected and not necessarily symptomatic person to others through respiratory aerosols and droplets created when an infected person breathes, talks, sings, shouts, coughs, or sneezes. Respiratory aerosols from talking and breathing can remain suspended in the air for prolonged periods.¹

If you are in contact with an infected person, the virus can enter your body through your nose, eyes, or throat. Even though COVID-19 can survive for varying lengths of time on different surfaces, infection from contact with contaminated surfaces appears to be rare. The most common type of spread is through contact with the respiratory aerosols or droplets from an infected person.

Getting immunized, staying home when sick, visiting others outdoors in small groups with appropriate distancing, wearing masks² in indoor public spaces and outdoors if distancing is not possible, maintaining adequate ventilation indoors, and regular handwashing with soap and water or a simple alcohol-based disinfectant are all important measures that will reduce transmission.

Personal Preventative Practices

As efforts continue across Canada to increase overall vaccine coverage and lower community transmission, public health measures remain the foundation of the pandemic response.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/summary-evidence-supporting-covid-19-public-health-measures.html>

² The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) now recommends medical masks or respirators, previously only recommended for health professionals, as protection from COVID-19. N95 and KN95 masks are considered the most appropriate level of mask protection and are provided for staff. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>

Community transmission of COVID-19 continues, and new variants of concern continue to be identified and are circulating. This is why it remains important to consistently use multiple personal preventive practices simultaneously, regardless of vaccination status.

This is called a layered approach and it helps protect yourself and others. Think ahead about the actions you can take to stay healthy and prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- Stay informed and follow public health advice where available;
- Stay at home and minimize unnecessary close interactions;
- Avoid closed spaces and crowded places;
- Improve ventilation – including opening windows for cross ventilation;
- Wear a well-fitting mask (N95 or KN95); and
- Wash your hands frequently and keep surfaces clean.

The Nature Centre's Covid Policies

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre aims to keep risk of virus transmission as low as possible during weekend opening hours and Nature Centre events and program offerings, including building rental events.

Masks: are required to be worn in the Nature Centre and mandatory for all visitors, and for staff and volunteers in all the public spaces – including for washroom use which is only available when we have open hours or events. Signs with information about our mandatory mask policy are posted on the entrance doors and nearby windows to communicate this requirement. When working alone at the Centre a single staff member or volunteers may work without masking, e.g., working in the office or cleaning the aquarium when the Centre is closed.

Ventilation and CO2 Monitor: The Nature Centre has a heat exchanger that continuously exchanges inside and outside air while heating or cooling the building as needed. This unit should be kept on at all times. The Nature Centre also has a high-quality HEPA filter that filters particles as small as .1 micron (Covid-19 is .12 micron) and this filter should be kept on at its highest setting 1) when anyone is in the building and 2) using the timer for two hours after closing the Centre when there have been any unmasked staff or more than five people in the Centre in the hour prior to closing. When outside temperatures allow, windows and doors may be opened for additional air filtering and ventilation and if indicated by CO2 monitoring.

CO₂ monitoring is an established means of assessing whether ventilation is adequate and safe for the number of people occupying a space. Our CO₂ monitor sits on top of the HEPA filter and provides feedback on the effectiveness of ventilation and air filtration. The outside limit for long-term exposure for CO₂ in indoor air is 1,000 ppm in Canada, and the recommended maximum CO₂ concentration for healthy indoor air is no greater than 700 ppm above ambient

levels (assumed to range between 300 and 500 ppm).³ In addition to indicating CO2 ppm levels, our CO2 monitor also has a green, amber, and red indicator. With the HEPA filter on high it should stay in the green zone. If the monitor goes into the amber zone, this is a good time to open a window or door until it returns to green. If it enters the red zone, it's time for people to take a break outside.

Limiting numbers and physical distancing: The number of people who may be in the Nature Centre at any one time is limited to 20 people plus one staff/volunteer. Physical distancing is encouraged, unless people are members of a family group already in close contact.

Screening and isolation protocols for staff and volunteers

These strategies for screening, physical distancing controls, hand hygiene provisions, and touch point sanitization also support the health and safety of volunteers and visitors.

If any of the following conditions apply to a staff member or volunteer, they are asked not to come to the Nature Centre, but to stay home and self isolate until they have two consecutive negative tests at least 24 hours apart⁴:

- Any cold/flu-like [signs or symptoms](#) (fever, cough, tiredness, aches, or severe tiredness).
- Waiting for a test or test result for COVID-19.
- A suspected or confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19.
- Close contact with someone with a probable or confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis during the previous 10 days.

When a staff member or volunteer becomes sick with cold/flu-like symptoms at the Nature Centre:

- They will go home as soon as possible and stay at home if they are feeling unwell.
- If they develop symptoms during their workday of shift, they must leave the premises as soon as possible, and not admit any further visitors. Environmental cleaning will be done upon the departure of the symptomatic individual. If the person leaving is alone and closing the Centre, they should notify the Centre Coordinator or Board Chair/ED to ensure this cleaning takes place.
- If at least five days have passed since the onset of symptoms of infection, symptoms are no longer present, and the staff member feels well, testing before returning to work is requested. Staff may return to work onsite once they have had two consecutive

³ Indoor Air Quality and CO2 levels <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/carbon-dioxide-home.html>

⁴ Consistent with CDC guidelines, staff and volunteers are expected to be vaccinated and boosted up to date to the last six months. If an individual has had contact with someone with a suspected or confirmed case of Covid19, they must wear a mask around others for 10 days and begin COVID testing on day 5. With rapid testing, 2 consecutive negative tests with oral-nasal samples 24-48 hrs apart are needed for test reliability. If staff or a volunteer develops symptoms, they must isolate at home. After five days, if symptoms have abated and they have two negative oral-nasal test results 24-48 hrs apart, they may return to work at the Centre. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/if-youve-been-exposed-to-the-coronavirus>

negative rapid tests at least 24-hours apart.⁵ In the case of a post-symptom positive test, they may return to work onsite either alone or with the consent of other staff they work with, so long as they continue to mask (N95 or KN95) and take precautions until they have two consecutive test negatives. They may not lead programming until they have had two consecutive negative tests.⁶

- The coordinator will arrange for back-up staff/volunteers to fill in as needed and available.

Use of masks and gloves

- Masks are required to be worn in the Centre's public indoor spaces by everyone age 5 and older.
- We understand that there is low risk of transmission of the virus on surfaces, therefore gloves (other than for cleaning and sanitation purposes) do not need to be worn, e.g. for activities such as the exchange of money during gift store purchases. If staff or volunteers wish to use gloves, blue disposable nitrile gloves are in the tall cabinet in the office.
- Plastic face-shields are no longer considered adequate protection in place of masks. They are available for volunteers who would like to use them, in addition to their mask, as another layer of personal protection, and are stored on a hook on the back of the office door. They should be gently cleaned with soap and water or sanitizer after use.

Physical distancing controls

- Unless there is a reason to be closer to a visitor to assist them, staff/volunteers are asked to respect physical distancing between themselves and others whenever possible.
- Staff/volunteers must remain aware of the number of people within the Nature Centre or gathered close together outside the Centre at one time and encourage them to maintain physical distancing unless those people are already part of a family "bubble". While it is not common to have more than 20 visitors at a time, if the Centre already has the maximum of 20 visitors inside, members of the public are asked to wait outside or return. Summer camp floor dots, usually found on the welcome desk, can be used to aid in marking a 2-metre interval spacing on the deck outside for those wishing to wait there.

⁵ While Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the US and Canada have said someone can exit isolation five days after a positive test or the start of symptoms, so long as symptoms are improving, and they wear a mask an additional five days. This policy is based on data from variants prior to Omicron and is shaped by practical workforce considerations rather than current evidence. Emerging science indicates, with the Omicron and now newer emerging variants, as many as 50% of people who become infected can still be infectious beyond day ten. Testing, as described above is recommended.

⁴ Covid screening tests may show false negatives at the beginning of an infection, and both false negatives and false positives for a variable time after an infection. Rapid antigen tests are less sensitive for the Omicron and other post-Delta variants, especially in nasal only samples and in the first 1-2 days after infection, so false negatives are more common. Combined oral-nasal (inner cheek, throat, nose) samples with rapid antigen tests are recommended, as they can more reliably detect current infections. For Omicron and other post-Delta variants, a single negative rapid antigen test result cannot reliably rule out infection and should not be used as a green light for abandoning or reducing precautions. A subsequent negative test after a 24-hour, or even more reliable 48-hour interval, increases the reliability of the negative result. <https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/use-of-rapid-antigen-tests-during-the-omicron-wave/> Using Rapid Antigen Tests During the Omicron Wave, Feb 10, 2022

- A portable plexiglass screen at the volunteer welcome station counter provides a barrier between the public and staff/volunteers to increase protection from droplet infection (coughs, sneezes) at close range.

Hand hygiene provisions

All staff/volunteers are asked to wash their hands after touching shared material, surfaces, or equipment.

When beginning a shift, staff/ volunteers are asked to wash their hands with soap and water before they begin any activities. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is also available at the front door entry desk.

The touch tank is now an “observation tank” with only staff or trained volunteers touching/ holding creatures for teaching after washing their hands in plain water to reduce the risk of sanitizing and cleaning products getting in the water or near the inter-tidal creatures.

Cleaning and Sanitization

Transmission of COVID-19 via surfaces is rare, however, Nature Centre Volunteers and staff will undertake regular cleaning of the building and frequently touched objects and surfaces and use the following checklist, consistent with the Canadian Public Health Association, to guide this process:

- Cleaning with soap (or detergent) and water, or with oxygenic spray on surfaces. Cleaners do not necessarily kill germs, and cleaning can remove and lower their numbers, which reduces the risk of spreading infection.
- High-touch surfaces should be cleaned more often and when visibly dirty.
- Damp cleaning methods (damp clean cloths and wet mops) are preferred over dry methods (dusting and sweeping). Damp methods of cleaning are less likely to further distribute virus into the air.
- Put used disposable cleaning items in a lined garbage bin before throwing them out with regular waste. Reusable cleaning items can be washed using regular soap and hot water (60-90C).
- After cleaning, wash your hands with soap and water (at least 20 seconds recommended). If using gloves, wash your hands with soap and water after you've removed the gloves. If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be used.

If Someone is Sick

If the Nature Centre needs to be cleaned because someone with [Covid-19 signs or symptoms](#) has been working in or visiting the Centre, ventilation and filtering the air with the HEPA filter on high for at least two hours after everyone leaves the building is the most important action to take.

Appropriate soap and hot water, disinfectant or oxygenic spray and paper towels should be used for cleaning as follows, along with continued use of the Centre's HEPA filter:

- Washrooms: Use Oxygenic spray and paper towels to wipe taps, door handles, light switches, paper towel dispenser, soap dispenser handle, toilet seat and handles;
- Office – lights and light switches, workstation including chair, counter, keypad, and mouse phone that may have been touched;
- Money box and debit machine if used – wipe exterior and plastic cover of keypad;
- Touch/Observation tank – wipe outside edges of tank with paper towel sprayed with oxygenic cleaner (please be careful not to put chemical in the tank);
- Wipe Sink/tap, paper towel dispenser, countertop;
- Wipe Craft Station table and chairs including any frequently touched supplies (if used) such as art and craft materials – scissors/pencils etc.;
- Wipe Salmon Tank countertop, squeegee;
- Binoculars & microscopes: wipe clean with attention to eyepiece & knobs, chairs & counter;
- Alarm panel, light switches – careful to not use excessive cleaning solution;
- Wipe exit door handle, front door handle; and
- Mop floors.