

Gathering limit changes – June 18

Messages:

- There have been no new cases of COVID-19 for more than a week, and low rates for the last several weeks, thanks to Nova Scotians following public health protocols.
- Our aim is to safely open as much of the economy and our province as we can so that Nova Scotians and the business community can have a good summer.
- We are changing gathering limits, but core measures of physical distancing as much as possible, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, etc. stay in place.
- We're providing a new option for close social interaction because it's important for our well being, but everybody needs to make decisions that take into consideration the risks, their own circumstances, and how they help keep everyone safe

What are the changes?

- There are now two different gathering limits – a larger one with physical distancing of two metres or six feet, and a smaller one without. The new limits are effective on June 18.
- People can now gather in groups of up to 10 without physical distancing. They are not required to be exclusive but are strongly encouraged to be. This change replaces the concept of family household bubbles.
- People can now gather in groups of up to 50 with physical distancing. Members of the same household or a group of 10 can attend such gatherings together without physical distancing.
- The larger gathering limit of 50 applies to social events, faith gatherings, sports and physical activity, and arts and culture events like theatre performances, dance recitals, festivals and concerts.
- Businesses that are too small to ensure physical distancing can have no more than 10 people on their premises at a time.
- Playgrounds can reopen effective June 18.

Q&As

Why are you making these changes now?

A new gathering limit was announced on May 29 and businesses have started to reopen as of June 5. Nova Scotia has had no new cases for over a week and disease rates have remained low for several weeks before that. We're in good shape. While the risk of there being COVID-19 in Nova Scotia is low, we have to remain cautious and vigilant and continue to practice core public health measures like good hand hygiene, cough etiquette and physical distancing as part of our new normal of living with COVID 19.

Will there still be family household bubbles?

No, the ability to gather in groups of up to 10 without physical distancing replaces the concept of the family household bubble.

My family household bubble has more than 10 people in it. Does this mean not all of us can gather without physical distancing? How is that fair?

While our aim is to give Nova Scotians and businesses some more freedom, there is no one-size-fits all solution. The smaller gathering limit of 10 without physical distancing is flexible because groups can have different people at different times. If your former bubble had more than 10 people, they can still see each other without physical distancing – just not all at once. It is important that people are careful and limit the number of close social groups that they join.

There was a larger group allowed for outdoor weddings and funerals before. Can there be more than 50 for these events? Or is it 50 plus the officiant?

It is 50 total for weddings and funerals, including the officiant, whether they are indoors or outdoors.

For faith gatherings, is it 50 people in the congregation plus the officiant and others involved in the service?

It is 50 total for faith gatherings, including the officiant and others involved in the service. At this time, there can only be larger faith gatherings if they are drive-in.

Can child care centres and day camps now have groups of 50 instead of groups of 10? Or are they limited to a total of 50?

No, the gathering limit of 50 does 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. The only difference is that there is no longer a need for physical distancing within each group of 10.

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 limit.

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

We strongly encourage people to stick with the same 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 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 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.

Can I join/form a different group of 10 any time I want? Even on the same day? Even in two different communities?

In theory, yes you can but we discourage that. You should try to stick to the same people in your group. People also need to make decisions that they are comfortable with and should consider some key things when joining groups of 10 [noted above].

So a child can go from a morning day camp where they were in there non-distanced group of 10 to an afternoon sport practice where they are in a second non-distanced group of 10, and then spend the evening playing with friends in a third non-distanced group of 10? Isn't this very risky?

In theory, yes they can but we discourage that. You should try to stick to the same people in your group. People also need to make decisions that they are comfortable with and should consider some key things when joining groups of 10 [noted above].

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

The group of 10 is meant for gatherings – social events, arts and culture events, sports and physical activity, faith gatherings – not for things like elevators. 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 above].

How many people can get in an elevator?

In elevators, you should try to physically distance yourself from others as best you can. If the elevator is full, consider waiting for the next one or take the stairs. Be aware that elevator buttons are high-touch areas, so practice hand hygiene after using an elevator if you touched the buttons.

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 above].

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 above].

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

The gathering limit of 50 applies to sports and physical activities 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.

Can we have 50 people at a sports venue, broken into groups of 10 for closer activities?

Yes but we encourage you to try to stick with the same group of 10 rather than switching people in the group.

For an arts and culture performance or a sporting event, could there be 50 people in the audience?

It depends. If it's a child's dance recital, the performers are not a business so the gathering limit applies to both the performers and the audience.

If it's a business such as a theatre offering a 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.) There can be 50 in the audience.

Note that only members of the same household or group of 10 can engage in an activity together that involves getting closer than 2 metres/6 feet. That means a lot of sports games cannot be played yet because you generally need more than 10 players.

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 group of 10 can sit together, with these groups staying 2 metres/6 feet away from others.

Related to the two questions above, does the same apply if the arts and culture performance or sporting event is a business like Neptune or the Mooseheads?

Yes, although realistically, a limit of 50 doesn't work for their business models. We hope to have more information for how businesses like this could operate soon.

Could people (including strangers) arrive at a performance or sport event 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 above]. Also, not everyone is likely to be comfortable joining a group that includes strangers.

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

The gathering limit of 50 does not apply to most businesses. Businesses 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 people on the premises, including staff.

My business rents a room for weddings and parties and our maximum capacity is 50. Can I have 50 guests in that room?

The order allows gatherings of up to 50 people with physical distancing. So you can determine how many people the room can accommodate while ensuring everyone can stay 2 metres/6 feet apart.

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.