

COVID-19: new measures introduced on March 17

- We are taking additional steps to protect the health of Albertans.
- New public health measures are now recommended to limit the time Albertans spend in large crowds and crowded spaces. Effective immediately:
 - Mass gatherings are now limited to no more than 50 attendees.
 - This includes worship gatherings and family events, such as weddings and funerals.
 - This does not include: grocery stores, shopping centres, health-care facilities, airports, the legislature and other essential services.
 - Albertans are prohibited from attending public recreation facilities and private entertainment facilities.
 - This includes gyms, swimming pools, arenas, science centres, museums, art galleries, community centres, children's play centres, casinos, racing entertainment centres and bingo halls.
 - Albertans are restricted from attending bars and nightclubs, where minors are prohibited by law.
 - Sit-down restaurants, cafes, coffee shops, food courts and other food-serving facilities, including those with a minors-allowed liquor license, are limited to 50% capacity to a maximum of 50 people.
 - Take-out, delivery or drive-through service is permitted
 - Licensed facilities are permitted to deliver liquor
 - Buffet restaurants are an exception and must close
- These are aggressive steps that we do not take lightly, but these are necessary to keep us all healthy and safe.
- I understand the tremendous impact this will have on all of us. We will get through this together, but we need your help and support by following these recommendations and all other public health guidance.
- Albertans' health is and will always be our top priority.

Questions and Answers

What about dentists? Should people still be going for non-emergency dental services? How do dentist and dental hygienists maintain social distancing?

- At this time dentists can continue to operate, though we would encourage any non-emergency services to be postponed at this time.
- In the event that people still wish to go in for dental services, we would encourage dentists and dental hygienists to make sure that their patients are not sick or showing symptoms and that PPE is used to limit any risk of exposure.
- Ultimately, it is up to the Alberta Dental Association to determine when and how their members should operate.

Why aren't you closing shopping malls? I have heard that shopping malls have been especially crowded over the past few days since schools closed.

- We need to strike a careful balance between protecting public health and ensuring Albertans are able to access services and stores to meet their needs.

- While shopping centres will be able to stay open, they must include risk mitigations to do so.
- Mitigations could include employing hand sanitizer stations, frequent cleaning of surfaces, and reducing the maximum capacity to avoid crowding.
- We continue to closely monitor the situation, and we will take additional measures as necessary to protect Albertans' health.

Why are not-for-profit/soup-kitchens being exempt? These places are typically very crowded.

- We need to be mindful that vulnerable Albertans rely on these kinds of services for essential needs.
- These kind of sites will be able to stay open, but they must include risk mitigations to do so.
- Mitigations could include employing hand sanitizer stations, frequent cleaning of surfaces, and maintaining social distance.

What about animal shelters? Veterinary clinics?

- The measures introduced today are intended to limit the amount of time Albertans are spending in large crowds and crowded spaces.
- Animal shelters and veterinary clinics are able to stay open at this time. However, we encourage operators and owners to use risk mitigations, such as hand sanitizer stations, limiting the number of patrons at one time, and other measures.
 - For example, a veterinary clinic could space out chairs in a waiting room to encourage social distance between people.

An email sent to government staff on Sunday requested that staff report to work in person. Doesn't this go against your advice by endangering the health of public servants?

- Across government, work has been underway to support staff from working at home. This includes the tremendous amount of work that needs to happen to give remote access to large numbers of employees.
- We also continue to communicate to employees about COVID-19 and what they can do to limit their risk by employing the same hygiene practices that all Albertans should take.
- We have also taken steps to ensure hand sanitizer stations and bottles of sanitizer are available to all staff, where possible.

Why was a state of emergency declared in Alberta? What does this mean? What will it achieve?

- Alberta is following the same trend as in other jurisdictions, with an increase in confirmed cases, which means we have to take more aggressive measures.
- The Government of Alberta has declared a state of public health emergency later today, empowering authorities under the *Public Health Act* to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Alberta's Provincial Operations Centre has also been elevated from a level 3 to a level 4, the highest level.
- A state of public health emergency is declared so the provincial government can take centralized control and enact emergency plans. It also gives the government the power to use any property, service, resource or equipment anywhere in Alberta for the duration of the crisis.
- As of yet, we do not need to use any of the extra abilities this declaration gives us. But we know that this is a constantly changing situation.