

City Response to COVID-19
Key Messages
Last updated: 2020-03-26 4:58 PM

New key messages

City parks and amenities are now closed, walkthroughs permitted only

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all city park facilities and park equipment are now closed until further notice. Only walkthroughs are permitted – while respecting physical (social) distancing.

Sports fields and courts

- The amenities and spaces that are closed for use include:
 - Public sports fields – including those located at recreation facilities
 - Ball diamonds
 - Basketball and tennis courts
- These types of spaces and amenities encourage group gatherings and usage, which go against the physical (social) distancing measures being used to flatten the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Play structures and park equipment

- The closures apply to all play and park equipment, this includes:
 - Play structures
 - Swings
 - Slides
 - Climbers
 - Adult fitness stations
 - Benches and picnic tables
 - Skateboard parks
 - Off-leash dog enclosures
- Park and play equipment also encourage multiple users. More importantly, the surfaces are not being cleaned and could potentially spread the COVID-19 virus.

Walkthroughs permitted – maintain physical (social) distancing

- While the parks are closed, you are able to walk through them. Safe park practices that are permitted includes running, walking or jogging **through the park**, while keeping a two-metre distance from others – which is equal to the length of a hockey stick. You can also walk your dog through the park where this is allowed, while respecting the established leashing requirements for the site.

Launch of Buy Local promotional campaign and web page

- On Thursday, March 26, the City of Ottawa, in partnership with the Economic Partners Taskforce, launched the first phase of an online promotional campaign to help local businesses during these difficult times.
- The campaign encourages residents to support their favourite small businesses by taking immediate and concrete steps now:
 - Buy from local businesses online
 - Purchase gift cards from local businesses to use later
 - Order delivery or takeout from area restaurants
 - Send local businesses messages of support on social media
- These actions will help local shops, restaurants and services by providing them with critical income during this challenging period.
- The campaign includes targeted ads that will reach residents on several online platforms over the coming weeks and direct them to ottawa.ca/buylocal. There, residents will find links to sites listing businesses serving customers virtually or providing takeout and meal delivery.
- The City also launched a [web page](#) on ottawa.ca to provide businesses with access to essential information and support programs. The page will have links to provincial and federal assistance programs, as well as details on measures offered by the City to help businesses in the coming weeks and months. This includes the property tax deferral and other relief measures that Council approved at its meeting on March 25.

Human Needs Task Force

- A Human Needs Task Force has been implemented as part of the City's Emergency Management Plan and emergency response to COVID-19 to ensure that we are responsive to the emerging needs of the community.

- Key contacts:
 - **Food security**
 - **Ottawa Food Bank:** 613-745-7001 and ottawafoodbank.ca
 - **Good Companions** (Meals on Wheels): 613-236-0428 and thegoodcompanions.ca
 - Also contact for urgent transportation to appointments
 - **Isolated and/or vulnerable seniors and people experiencing homelessness**
 - [Seniors Centre Without Walls](http://SeniorsCentreWithoutWalls.ca) : 613-236-0428
 - Rural Ottawa Support Services [A Friendly Voice](http://AFriendlyVoice.ca) wellness calls to rural seniors connecting them to local services and programs: 613-692-9992
 - Mental Health Crisis Line: 613-722-6914 (within Ottawa) or Toll-free 1-866-996-0991 (outside Ottawa)
 - Better Strength, Better Balance program on Roger's TV
 - [Ottawa Community Housing](http://OttawaCommunityHousing.ca) wellness checks: 613-731-1182
 - [Ottawa Inner City Health](http://OttawaInnerCityHealth.ca): supports to homeless add number
 - **Emergency financial assistance**
 - **Call 3-1-1 and press 4 for social services** (i.e. medical needs, trouble paying utility bills, housing arrears, etc.)
 - **Community-based social services**
 - **Call 2-1-1** Help Line – referrals to local community, social, government and health services.
 - **Volunteer coordination**
 - Volunteer Ottawa has established a pool of pre-screened volunteers and will continue to accept new applicants: <https://www.volunteerottawa.ca>
 - The City of Ottawa and the Human Needs Task Force are working with United Way to solidify a community approach to receive and place volunteers.
 - **Human Needs Task Force contact information**
 - English: SCS_HNTF@ottawa.ca
 - French: SCS_GTBH@ottawa.ca
 - Phone number: 613-580-2424 ext. 26753
 - For more information, visit ottawa.ca/covid19

Existing key messages

Municipal state of emergency

- On March 25, 2020, Mayor Jim Watson declared a state of emergency for the City of Ottawa due to the spread of COVID-19 in Ottawa.
- This aligns with Ontario Premier Doug Ford's announcement on Monday, March 23 that he is expanding Ontario's state of emergency to shut down all non-essential services.
- Declaring a state of emergency helps the City deploy its emergency operations and staff in a more nimble fashion. It also enables a more flexible procurement process, which will help purchase equipment required by frontline workers and first responders as it becomes available in the coming weeks.
- Following the declaration, the City formally requested the Province of Ontario to give the City flexibility to manage movement of staff, to redeploy resources, to support essential services and to be adaptable as this situation continues to evolve rapidly.

Taxes and water utility bills

Property owners given more time to pay

- City Council today approved a [property-tax relief package](#) and water payment grace period for residents and small businesses impacted by COVID-19.
- Property owners will have a grace period for payment of interim property taxes and will not incur a penalty if they were unable to pay before the deadline of March 19. The grace period will extend the deadline to Wednesday, April 15. The interim property tax bill covers 50 per cent of the entire property tax bill.
- Council also approved the 2020 Property Tax Hardship Deferral program to assist qualifying residents as well as businesses that have an assessed property value of up to \$7.5 million. The assessed property value criteria of up to \$7.5 million captures 91 per cent of all commercial properties in Ottawa. The program extends both the interim property tax deadline (March 19) and the final property tax deadline (June 18) to Friday, October 30.
- The City will provide relief to residents who receive a water bill, adding an interest-free 30-day payment grace period on all unpaid water bills issued before Wednesday, April 1. For water bills issued between Wednesday, April 1 and Friday, October 30, the City will

grant a 30-day extension on the due date. These measures will provide residents 47 days to pay their bill. Those on pre-authorized payment plans with water bills issued between April 1 and October 30 will also have their due dates extended and no action is required. The City has extended suspension of all water service disconnections until October 30.

- Additionally, all unpaid Corporate Accounts Receivable invoices that the City issued before Wednesday, April 1 will have an extra 30 days to pay, interest free. All Corporate Accounts Receivable invoices issued between Wednesday, April 1 and Thursday, April 30 will also have a 30-day due-date extension.
- More details on the programs and the qualifying criteria are available on ottawa.ca.
- On March 25, 2020, Mayor Jim Watson declared a state of emergency for the City of Ottawa due to the spread of COVID-19 in Ottawa.
- On March 13, 2020 the City entered Activated Operations in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.
- On March 17, 2020 the Province of Ontario declared a provincial state of emergency.
- The City continues to work with Ottawa Public Health and local health partners to help prevent the further spread of COVID-19 in Ottawa.
- We are monitoring the spread of the virus and will provide updates when they are available.
- OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus is the best source of local information on COVID-19.
- ottawa.ca/covid19 is the best source of information for the City's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

City facilities and services

City services currently available

- If you are unable to access City services online, please call 3-1-1 so we can assist you.
- Property taxes
- You can pay online by credit or Visa debit or through your financial institution.
- You can pay in person by cheque. Ensure that the amount on the cheque reflects the exact amount owing and includes the 19-digit tax

roll number shown on your tax bill. Please drop the cheque off in the secure payment box outside the main entrances of:

- Kanata Client Service Centre at 580 Terry Fox Drive
- Orleans Client Service Centre at 255 Centrum Boulevard
- Payments are processed on business days only.

Water bills

- Pay [online](#) with My ServiceOttawa or through your financial institution.

Provincial offences and parking tickets:

- Call 3-1-1 and follow the prompts.

Other online services:

- [Register or renew a pet registration](#)
- [Apply for or renew an open air fire permit](#)
- [Pay a parking or traffic ticket](#)
- [Apply for a Food Premise Business License](#)
- [Load or manage a Presto Card](#)

City facilities and services currently closed

- The following City facilities and services are closed to the public based on the Ministry of Health's guidance to limit mass gatherings to help prevent the spread of COVID-19:
 - All counter services
 - All Ottawa Public Library branches
 - All City of Ottawa client service centres
 - All OC Transpo customer service centres
 - All municipal child care centres
 - Mary Pitt Centre at 100 Constellation Drive
 - Ben Franklin Place at 101 Centrepointe Drive
 - Trail Waste Facility
 - Building Code Services counters
 - Rooming house inspections
 - Taxi inspections
 - All hearings by the Animal Control Tribunal and the Property Standards and License Appeals Committee
 - Interior noise meter readings between 7 am and 11 pm
 - Child car seat inspections
 - CPR/First Aid training sessions
 - Palliative Care Program
 - The *Provincial Offences Act* courthouse. All *Provincial Offences Act* matters scheduled from Monday, March 16, 2020 to Friday, April 3, 2020 will be adjourned and rescheduled. You will

receive a notice of your new court date by mail at the address on file with the court.

- All recreation and cultural facilities, including recreation complexes, community centers, arenas, swimming pools, theatres and museums.
 - Rental fees will be refunded automatically.
 - All Active Ottawa fitness memberships will be extended automatically for the duration the facility is closed, beginning March 16, 2020.
- City programs, including March break camps and fitness classes.
 - Program fees will be refunded automatically.
- Performances at the Shenkman and Meridian Theatres.
- In-person public consultations, including for the Ward Boundary Review and the Community Safety and Well-being Plan.
 - You can still participate through [online surveys](#).

Child care

- The Province's declaration of an emergency on Tuesday, March 17 required licensed child care centres to close immediately. This order does not apply to home child care providers overseen by licensed agencies or unlicensed home child care providers.
- Licensed child care centres, including municipal child care centres, licensed home child care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres are closed.
- On March 23, 2020, The Ministry of Education, who is responsible for licensed child care in the Province in partnership with Children's Services, announced that they will work to support the provision of licensed child care in specific locations for health care and other frontline workers, free of charge to parents.
- Children's Services is developing a local plan to support the opening and oversight of the emergency licensed child care, and working with Ottawa Public Health to determine guidelines and recommendation for emergency care locations.
- Next steps will include developing a child care registry to ensure families can apply for emergency care and developing a prioritization criteria. In the interim, families are asked to email any questions to childrensservices@ottawa.ca.

City staff

- Thanks to City staff working on the frontlines, our emergency response personnel and City staff continuing to deliver essential services and information during these unprecedented times.
- Thanks to the medical professionals in Ottawa who are working around the clock to provide exceptional care to our residents.

Economic Partners Task Force

- We realize that the closures taking place are deeply affecting our local business community.
- These are challenging times, and we must come together to find ways to support our small businesses, restaurants, tourism operators and special events, as well as the tens of thousands of workers who rely on these jobs to feed their families.
- Following a call with the heads of our local business improvement areas, the Ottawa Board of Trade, le Régroupement des gens d'affaires, Ottawa Tourism and the Ottawa Festival Network, we created an Economic Partners Task Force.
- Mayor Watson will co-chair this task force, along with Councillor Eli El-Chantiry, a former small business owner and the Mayor's representative with the business improvement areas.
- The task force will advise City staff in many departments on how we can help the business community as this pandemic evolves.
- We remain committed to working with all our economic development partners as we work to support all of our small businesses to get through this difficult time.

Employment and Social Services

- Ontario Works financial assistance may be available for basic living expenses and health expenses.
- Residents in need of emergency financial assistance (i.e. medical needs, trouble paying utility bills, housing arrears, etc.) can call 3-1-1 and press 4 for social services.
- All Ontario Works and ODSP cheques are being issued as usual at the end of the month. Ontario Works clients may call or email their caseworkers, as needed.
- All Rent Geared to Income and Rent Supplement programs are suspending all documentation requirements and annual updates. These financial supports will continue as usual.
- Staff are waiting on further direction on changes to the Employment Insurance program.

Human Needs Task Force

- The City has established a Human Needs Task Force to ensure we are responsive to the emerging needs of the community.
- In addition to representatives from City departments and Ottawa Public Health, the task force includes partners from all sectors, including United Way East Ontario, Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa, Ottawa Community Housing, Ottawa Food Bank, Canadian Red Cross, The Salvation Army and Ottawa Inner City Health.
- The task force is receiving, assessing and triaging all social and human needs inquiries, while mobilizing and supporting community organizations to address urgent community needs.
- The task force is currently focused on service coordination for immediate, medium and long-term response associated with five emerging needs:
 - Outreach to isolated seniors
 - Food security
 - Transportation
 - Volunteer coordination
 - Housing and homeless needs
- Our immediate priorities are to ensure our partners are doing outreach to isolated seniors, address food security needs, provide urgent transportation, coordinate volunteers, and offer housing supports for vulnerable residents.
- Please ask anyone facing difficulty to call 3-1-1. The City of Ottawa has many supports in place for residents in need and are expanding our capacity to meet local need.

Housing Services

- The City continues to support residents experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless through emergency shelters, support services and outreach. Funding for homelessness programs continues. Some agencies are closed, but staff are available by phone. Agencies that are open have reduced staffing, are physical (social) distancing and are following strict hygiene procedures.
- Households and landlords will get housing allowances and rent supplements one week early to assist with cash flow.
- There will be no evictions from social housing during this time. The Social Housing Registry continues to take calls from residents. People fleeing domestic violence can continue to apply for priority housing.

- Housing providers are checking in with vulnerable tenants over the phone.
- Visits to the City's family shelter are limited to specialized services.
- Ottawa Inner City Health is visiting shelters with a mobile assessment van and has a nurse on call during evenings and weekends.
- The City is exploring options for families who may need to self-isolate due to exposure, symptoms or testing positive for COVID-19.
- The Isolation Centre at the Routier Community Centre at 172 Guigues Avenue opened on Monday, March 23, 2020 to provide space for homeless single people who need to self-isolate.
- Housing Services has secured a 29-room location to provide isolation space for families and youth, which is anticipated to open the week of April 1, 2020.
- Housing Services has also identified additional hotel rooms for families currently in the shelter and motel system to promote physical (social) distancing, and to increase access to cooking facilities.
- Rooming House Services is conducting visits to each licensed rooming house address, delivering resources from Ottawa Public Health on COVID-19. They are also working with the Parkdale Food Market to deliver frozen meals and bread to rooming house tenants.

How residents can help

- If you are looking to support your community during this critical period, you can help by checking in with family, friends and neighbours who may be vulnerable, overwhelmed, lonely or in need of help.
- Where possible, consider calling or video chatting. Do not visit in person if you have a fever, new or worsening cough or difficulty breathing, or if you have been in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19.
- Help prevent the spread of harmful misinformation by only sharing content from trusted sources like [Ottawa Public Health](#), the [Ontario Ministry of Health](#) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).
- The City is not looking for volunteers to help with the COVID-19 situation at this time.

Long-term care

- The City's four long-term care homes are in operation. Staff are following best practices to ensure everyone's safety, including screening all visitors.

- Visitors are limited to family visiting residents at end of life or in palliative care.
- Seniors are vulnerable for serious and life-threatening complications from COVID-19. An extensive screening process has been instituted in our long-term care facilities. Any visitors or staff who may feel ill, have been in contact with anyone not feeling well or have recently travelled outside Canada should not visit to protect loved ones and their fellow residents.
- Adult day programs and tours of the homes have been cancelled.

Parking restrictions

- All overtime parking, signed or unsigned, will no longer be enforced on residential streets until further notice. This is to encourage and support residents to stay at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- All other parking restrictions, including, no stopping, no parking, fire route, accessible parking, minimum distance from fire hydrants and no parking on sidewalks to maintain emergency access and traffic flow, remain in effect.
- Complaints for unauthorized parking on private property now require new electronic procedures for proof of authority.

Public transit

- octranspo.com is the best source of information for current information on transit service.
- OC Transpo is committed to keeping customers and staff safe.
- Do not use public transit if you have a fever, new cough or difficulty breathing, or if you have been in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19.
- OC Transpo has taken measures, such as rear-door boarding and exiting, to help protect residents and staff.
- To protect yourself and others while using public transit:
 - Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue or your sleeve, not your hand.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
 - When possible, consider physical (social) distancing (ideally two metres).
 - Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer before you touch your eyes, nose or mouth, and as soon as possible when you reach your destination.

- The train doors on the Confederation Line that are closest to the operator cabs are temporarily closed.
 - OC Transpo has installed tape to block the doors and the area closest to the operator cab from the rest of the train.
 - You can still use cooperative seating areas in all parts of the train.
 - If you have a bicycle, you should use the next closest door at the front of the train. There are bicycle stickers on the appropriate door.
- Staff are looking at barrier options for Trillium Line trains.

Service Changes

- To date, OC Transpo has maintained normal levels of O-Train, bus, and Para Transpo service. We have been monitoring ridership levels closely and have noticed a drop of between 70 and 90 percent in customer volumes.
- Maintaining service to all neighbourhoods and to essential services, such as grocery stores, pharmacies and hospitals, at levels that will still allow customers to safely space themselves out on trains and buses and maintain physical (social) distancing continues to be a priority.
- With reduced ridership and COVID-19 potential impacts to the workforce, an adjustment to our multi-modal transit system is required to sustain and continue to provide the service while at the same time ensuring levels of service that enable physical distancing.
- In consultation with our Union partners, we are able to introduce changes to O-Train, bus, and Para Transpo service, while being careful to align with the objectives that are noted above.
- Starting this week, OC Transpo will be adjusting service levels on routes across the system. Visit [octranspo.com](https://www.octranspo.com) for the complete list of service impact.
- OC Transpo is adjusting service levels in response to reduced ridership.
- Service will be maintained to all neighbourhoods and essential services.
- Service levels will still allow customers to maintain physical (social) distancing on trains and buses.
- Levels may be adjusted further as the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve.
- Customers can change their autorenew settings at [Prestocard.ca](https://www.prestocard.ca). Metrolinx has extended the deadline to cancel

autorenewal of April monthly transit passes to Friday, March 27 at 11:59 pm.

Conventional Bus

- Beginning Monday, March 30:
 - Service will continue to be provided in all neighborhoods
 - Weekday service will move to Saturday service levels on many routes
 - Many weekday routes, will run at modified service levels
 - Rural weekly shopper services will continue as usual
 - The first morning trip will start later than usual on many routes
 - Saturday and Sunday service will operate as usual
 - Complete schedules and details of changes will be available on octranspo.com

O-Train Line 1, the Confederation Line

- Beginning Friday, March 27:
 - Service start and end times remain the same with one exception
 - On Fridays, service will end at 1 am Saturday morning, and overnight bus service will be available from that time
 - Trains will arrive every 6 to 8 minutes during peak periods and every 10 to 16 minutes at other times

O-Train Line 2, the Trillium Line

- Beginning Wednesday, March 25:
 - Service start and end times remain unchanged
 - Trains will arrive every 15 minutes at all times
 - Tape will be installed to block the operator cab area from the rest of the train

Para Transpo

- Beginning Tuesday March 24:
 - All trip requests made a day in advance are being accommodated
 - Most trips are being operated with only one customer on board, to allow for social distancing
 - Service levels are being managed according to demand

Reimbursements for cancellations

Recreation and cultural facilities

- All City of Ottawa recreation and cultural facilities, including recreation complexes, community centers, arenas, swimming pools, theatres, libraries and museums are closed. City programs, including March break camps and fitness classes, are cancelled.

- Information regarding credits and refunds for cancelled programs can be found on ottawa.ca.

Children's services

- The City's Financial Services Unit will issue account credits to eligible families in receipt of a fee subsidy and full-fee families enrolled in Municipal Child Care Centres as a result of child care services not being available. Families who have a credit balance on their account will be reimbursed using the same method of payment used to make the original payment.
- All reimbursements are being prioritized and will be completed as quickly as possible. In addition, preauthorized bank and credit card payments for April 1, 2020 have been temporarily suspended to help support families and will be reassessed as this situation continues to evolve.

Transit fares

- OC Transpo continues to provide transit service throughout Ottawa.
- Public transit is a critical service to all residents and OC Transpo continues to provide this service throughout the city on all modes: bus, train and Para Transpo.
- Refunds will not be issued as this service is continuing to operate.
- There are a number of options for customers who require financial assistance.
- The Government of Canada and Province of Ontario have also announced additional financial supports for residents requiring financial assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Self-isolation and COVID-19 testing

- Even if you do not have symptoms, it is recommended to self-isolate for 14 days if:
 - You have travelled outside Canada, including the United States.
 - You live with, provided care for or spent extensive time with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, is suspected of having COVID-19 or has a fever, cough or shortness of breath that started within 14 days of travel outside Canada.
- If you have mild symptoms, where you are not short of breath and can manage your symptoms reasonably at home, do not call Ottawa Public Health. Self-isolate until 24 hours after your symptoms have

fully resolved. Most people with mild symptoms will recover on their own at home.

- If you have escalating symptoms, such as a new or worsening cough or fever and have either travelled outside of Canada or been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days, either visit the COVID-19 Assessment Centre (you do not need a referral from Ottawa Public Health) or call your health care provider. If both are closed, go to the hospital emergency department and follow special signs.
 - The assessment centre is at Brewer Arena, 151 Brewer Way. It is open daily from 9 am to 8 pm. Do not bring healthy people, including children.
 - Take children under 6 months of age meeting these criteria to CHEO.
- If you have severe symptoms, like frequent shortage of breath, and cannot manage your symptoms at home, go to the hospital emergency department and follow special signs. If this is a medical emergency, please call 9-1-1 immediately.
- Physical (social) distancing is critical to help flatten the curve and to protect as many people in our community as possible, including your friends and loved ones.

Wastewater and waste management

- Do not flush sanitizing wipes or any other wipes down your toilet.
- Follow the 3Ps: paper (toilet paper), pee and poop only.
- Wipes can clog your toilets and lead to costly plumbing costs. They can also block and severely damage our wastewater system.
- Residents should continue to practice good hygiene when handling any waste by thoroughly cleaning their hands and any surfaces that may have come in contact.
- As Ottawa's green bin program is accepting plastic bags as a bagging option for organic waste, during COVID-19, used paper facial tissues should be placed in plastic bags and can go in the green bin as per regular [waste disposal practices](#).
- City staff and contractors continue to use the precautions that are already in place to protect workers from the hazards of handling municipal waste. In addition, we are taking steps to ensure a steady supply of personal protective equipment is available to our front-line staff. Ottawa Public Health manages the disposal of hazardous waste and has protocols in place to ensure its safe handling.