



COVID-19: MANDATORY MASKING IN COURTHOUSES

Friday, July 3, 2020

Effective Monday, July 6, 2020, all visitors entering a courthouse in Nova Scotia will be required to wear a non-medical mask (NMM) in all common areas of the building to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Masks will not be required in secure areas of courthouses or in courtrooms, unless directed by the presiding judge.

On June 25, 2020, the COVID-19 Court Recovery Committee released its Recovery Plan for expanding the services available during the pandemic, including in-person hearings. At that time, masks were not required, however, the Committee encouraged the use of a non-medical mask in situations where exposure to crowded public spaces was unavoidable and consistent physical distancing was not possible.

The Committee noted that the Recovery Plan is a living document that will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect new evidence and understanding of the spread of COVID-19, as well as changes to public health advice.

Since the plan's release, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer has enhanced its guidance around the use of non-medical masks. This development is related to Nova Scotia continuing to lift public health restrictions, including the introduction of the Atlantic bubble on July 3, 2020.

The Court Recovery Committee met recently to discuss these developments and agreed an update to the plan was needed. The full update is available online [here](#).

Public access to courthouses continues to be restricted to those who work in the building, who are involved in a hearing or those who have an appointment. Sheriffs are conducting screening at all courthouses to ensure a visitor's presence is required and that it is safe for them to attend. To maintain the open courts principle, members of the media are permitted to attend court in person.

Anyone permitted inside a courthouse is encouraged to bring their own non-medical mask. However, for those who may not have one, a supply of disposable masks will be available at the front doors. Non-medical masks must be worn in all common areas of the building, including entrance lobbies, elevators, waiting areas and interview rooms.

Every effort is being made to maintain physical distancing inside courthouses by limiting the number of people inside the building and in courtrooms, reconfiguring all spaces for physical distancing, and facilitating the movement of people by sheriffs. However, the Committee recognizes that there will be situations, especially in smaller courthouses, where physical distancing will be challenging at times.

It is important to emphasize that non-medical masks are not a substitute for physical distancing and other public health directives. They are part of a multi-layered approach to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The full Recovery Plan, including the safety guidelines and protocols implemented at the Nova Scotia Courts, is available online [here](#).

-30-

Media Contact:

Jennifer Stairs
Communications Director
Nova Scotia Judiciary
902-221-5257
stairsjl@courts.ns.ca