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Guidance for Museums Reopening After Closure due to COVID-19

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Introduction

In *A Framework for Reopening our Province*, the Government of Ontario has laid out a three-phase plan to responsibly reopen businesses, services and public spaces while keeping health and safety of Ontarians as the top priority.

As of the writing of this document (June 17, 2020) [Stage 2 of Phase 2 of the Province's reopening plan has begun on June 12, 2020 for certain regions of Ontario](#). Museums may open in these regions if they follow specific restrictions (see page 3). Regions not included on the list must remain in Stage 1 and therefore museums in those regions must remain closed until further notice.

Since March 2020, the Ontario Museum Association has been updating the dedicated [COVID-19 Resources page](#) on our website and organizing webinars to give members the information they need to operate during closure and prepare to reopen. Please visit this page regularly to access compiled resources from organizations in Ontario and around the world.

The OMA has created this document to provide information that will help Ontario museums to make decisions about whether to reopen, when to reopen, and how to reopen responsibly and safely. ***That all museums will reopen to the public in the near future is not a foregone conclusion.*** The decision to reopen any museum will be based on government and scientific guidance, but the financial and operational considerations that directors, funders and policy-makers must take into account mean that reopening will be a difficult process for many museums.

The OMA is working to support museums to operate safely and with the resources they need to be sustainable in a new and uncertain reality. Whether museums are able to welcome visitors into their buildings or whether they engage with their communities in other ways, the OMA is and will be a staunch advocate and champion of the value of museums to all communities in Ontario.

This is a living document that will be updated as new information becomes available.

Disclaimer

This resource is intended to serve as a guide to help museums to make informed decisions as they plan to reopen sites to staff, volunteers, and the public. Wherever possible this document points to Ontario Government resources and guidelines, and to Ontario-specific guidance from trusted sources. This document is not meant to supersede any regulations or guidance from provincial, federal or local governments or public health authorities, and where any discrepancies exist, guidance from these authorities must take precedence.

The Ontario Museum Association encourages museums to consult with their local government and public health authorities as they develop their reopening plans, and to seek legal advice and consult their insurance companies regarding their specific circumstances as needed.

Public Health and Provincial Reopening Guidelines

Museums must base decisions on the most current public health guidance and provincial reopening guidelines available.

- [Health Canada](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)
- [Province of Ontario COVID-19 Information](#)
- [Framework for Reopening Our Province](#)

We encourage museums to monitor all announcements from the above organizations and modify their plans accordingly.

In consultation with the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Cultural Industries, the following provincial requirements for museums have been compiled.

Reopening Requirements for Museums, Attractions and Heritage Institutions

Overview

Museums, galleries, aquariums, zoos, science centres, landmarks, historic sites, botanical gardens and similar attractions may reopen during Stage 2 if they comply with Reg. 263/20 under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, as well as the requirements provided in the Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 2.

Reg. 263/20 under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act can be found [here](#).

A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 2 can be found [here](#).

Reg. 263/20 Under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act

Museums need to comply with two sections of the regulation - general compliance for businesses and specific instructions for museums:

General Compliance

4. (1) The person responsible for a business or organization that is open shall ensure that the business or organization operates in accordance with all applicable laws, including the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and the regulations made under it.

(2) The person responsible for a business or organization that is open shall operate the business or organization in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials, including any advice, recommendations or instructions on physical distancing, cleaning or disinfecting.

(3) The person responsible for a business that is open to the public, or an organization responsible for a facility that is open to the public, shall ensure that the place of business or facility is operated to enable members of the public in the place of business or facility

to, to the fullest extent possible, maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from other persons.

(4) Subsection (3) does not require the business or facility to be operated in such a way as to enable physical distancing of persons who have arrived at the business or facility together.

(5) The person responsible for a business or place that is open shall ensure that any washrooms made available to the public are cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary environment.

Information on cleaning and safety can be found [here](#).

Museums, etc.

23. Museums, galleries, aquariums, zoos, science centres, landmarks, historic sites, botanical gardens and similar attractions may open if they comply with the following conditions:

1. No member of the public may be permitted access to interactive exhibits or exhibits that would create a high risk of personal contact.
2. Lockers must not be provided to members of the public.
3. Any equipment that is rented or provided to patrons must be cleaned and disinfected between each use.

Information on cleaning and safety can be found [here](#).

A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 2

In addition to the provisions in Reg. 263/20, museums must also comply with the requirements laid out in *A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 2*:

Museums, galleries, aquariums, zoos outdoor heritage institutions (for example, landmarks, outdoor historic sites, botanical gardens), and other establishments primarily engaged in preserving and exhibiting objects, sites and natural wonders of historical, cultural and educational value are permitted to reopen with restrictions.

- Interactive and high-contact exhibits, amusement parks, water parks and conference centres will remain closed in Stage 2.
- Lockers will remain closed.
- The opening of commercial areas (for example, restaurant, cafe, bookshop, giftshop) are subject to the related guidelines and restrictions.
- Persons in the place of business shall maintain physical distancing of at least two

metres from each other at all times by:

- Timed entry
- A Limited number of visitors allowed in a place at one time
- Managed visitor flow (for example, one-way flow)
- Establishments should consider operating by appointment and/or record each patron's name and contact information for the purpose of contact tracing.

Museums must also comply with requirements around retail and food services if relevant to their institutions.

Existing Provincial Guidance Material

Any guidance provided to museums, attractions and heritage institutions on how to safely reopen must align with existing provincial guidance. A few relevant examples are provided below:

- [Workplace Safety & Prevention Services: Guidance on Health and Safety for Tourism and Hospitality Sector during COVID-19](#)
- [Public Services Health & Safety Association: Health and Safety Guidance During COVID-19 For Library Employers](#)
- [Workplace Safety & Prevention Services: Guidance on Health and Safety for Retail Sector during COVID-19](#)
- [Workplace Safety & Prevention Services: Guidance on Health and Safety for Office Sector during COVID-19](#)

Considerations for Re-entry and Re-opening

Ontario museums always strive to achieve best practices and to meet the [Standards for Community Museums in Ontario](#) and consult with heritage and museum advisory staff at the [Ministry of Heritage, Tourism, Sport and Cultural Industries](#). At this time more than ever, museums are finding creative ways to meet standards and fulfil their mandates while keeping people safe.

The following are topics and links to resources to help museums to create their own plans for reopening both to staff and volunteers and to the public. Every museum's situation will be unique and will need to take into account direction from local public health authorities and the specific context of the physical site and the individuals, organizations, and communities involved.

Create Your Reopening and Recovery Plan

Plan Templates and Resources

- The Government of Ontario has provided information on how to [develop your COVID-19 workplace safety plan](#) that includes a template you can use to create your own.

Create a Reopening and Recovery Team

- Create a team within your museum if possible. This group could include Board members, staff, and volunteers, and members of your [Joint Health and Safety Committee](#).
 - The [Alberta Museums Association Membership Advisory Part 1](#) includes helpful information and resources for creating an Emergency Response Team (ERT) which can act as a Reopening and Recovery Team.
- If your organization is very small, consider creating a Reopening and Recovery Team with other small organizations within your Regional Museum Network. [Contact the OMA](#) to find your local Regional Museum Network.

Create a plan with a phased timeline

- Ontario's [Framework for Reopening Our Province](#) identifies three phases for reopening and recovery. Consider using a similar approach for your museum that identifies what steps need to happen and what conditions need to be met before the next phase can begin.
- Allow for flexible timelines as shifts will be necessary and timelines may be longer than anticipated.

Maintain Clear and Consistent Internal and External Communications

- It is important to maintain clear and consistent messaging about your reopening plans both internally (with board, staff and volunteers) and externally.
 - Provide regular updates to all staff and volunteers, including those on temporary leave.
 - Update your website and social media channels to keep your community informed.

- Keep suppliers, community partners, funders, and insurers informed about changes to your operations.
- Consider sharing and reviewing your reopening plan with other museums and community organizations in your area, as well as your local government [public health unit](#), and tourism partners.
- Sharing with other organizations may highlight opportunities for collaboration, such as bulk ordering of supplies.
 - [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#)
- Keep your members and audience informed about your plans and find out what they need.
 - Consider reaching out to your local community to find out what measures need to be in place for people to be comfortable visiting your site when it reopens. Some examples include:
 - [Lang Pioneer Village](#)
 - [The Diefenbunker](#)
 - [Pickering Museum Village](#)

Determine the Minimum Requirements that Need to be in Place for Museum Staff and Volunteers to Re-enter the Museum *Before it is Open to the Public*

Questions and Considerations

Consider the following within the timelines laid out in your plan.

- Financial
 - What resources does the museum need to meet all normal financial commitments (e.g. rent, utilities, internet, wages, etc.) as well as additional costs such as cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment?
 - What grants or subsidies need to be confirmed or received?
- Staffing
 - Many museums have laid off or furloughed staff or postponed seasonal hiring. Consider how long it will take to hire or bring staff back and to train them in new cleaning protocols, emergency procedures, etc.
 - Be aware that some individuals may need to remain on leave or may need to continue working from home to care for family members.
 - Consider the needs of individuals who may be more at risk than others e.g. elderly volunteers, those with underlying conditions, those whose roles put them in closer contact with others.
 - Build in time to review policies and to train staff in new visitation patterns, customer service protocols, and dealing with non-compliant visitors.
- Facility
 - If the museum has been inaccessible while closed – has it been inspected to ensure that buildings and grounds are safe for staff and volunteers to return to work?
 - Do work areas need to be rearranged to ensure physical distancing?
 - Who has had access to the museum and has the space been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected or quarantined?

- Safety equipment and supplies
 - Does the museum have an adequate supply of products and materials to properly clean and disinfect all work areas?
 - Does the museum have an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (e.g. masks, gloves) for staff and volunteers if needed?
 - Does the museum have a reliable source for restocking supplies as needed?

Resources

- [Post Pandemic Business Resumption Checklist](#)
- [Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Post-Pandemic Business Playbook: A guide for COVID-19 Pandemic Preparedness and Response](#)

Ontario Guidelines for Workplaces

Working at your museum after COVID-19 will not be the same as it was before the pandemic. The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development and Provincial health and safety associations have created guidance documents for different kinds of workplaces.

As museum work incorporates a wide variety of roles, several different guides may apply and the OMA encourages consultation of the following:

- Government of Ontario - [Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace](#)
- Government of Ontario - [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) and workplace health and safety](#)
- Government of Ontario - [Develop your COVID-19 workplace safety plan](#)
- Ontario Ministry of Health - [COVID-19 Guidance: Essential Workplaces](#)
- Workplace Safety and Prevention Services - [COVID-19 Resources for Business still operating, for businesses operating remotely, and for businesses preparing to reopen](#)
- Public Service Health and Safety Association - [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resource Centre: Links & Resources for Workers & Employers](#)

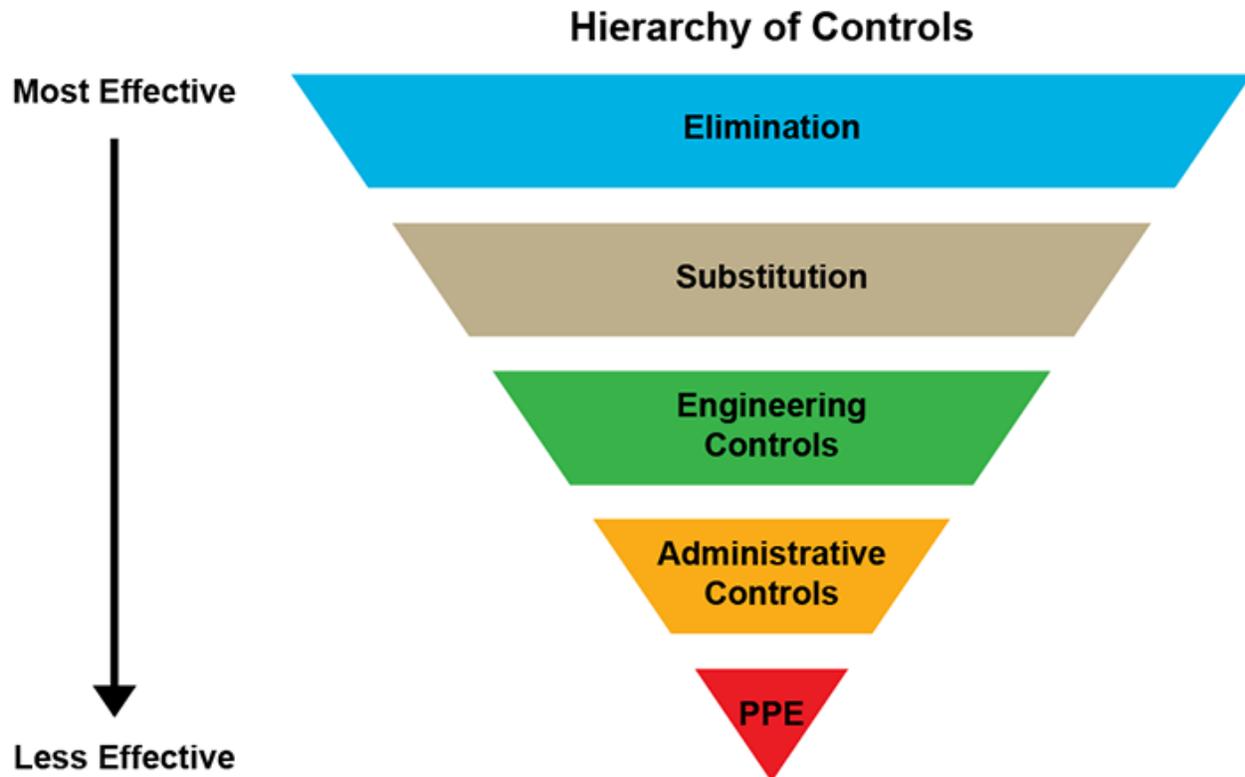
Recommended Considerations

- The Hierarchy of Controls
 “The hierarchy of controls (image and description below) can help you choose the right controls for your workplace. This applies to all workplace hazards, not just COVID-19.

The levels in the hierarchy of controls, in order from most effective to least effective, are:

- elimination
- substitution
- engineering controls
- administrative controls
- personal protective equipment (PPE)”¹

¹ Quoted from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/develop-your-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan>. More details descriptions of controls can be found at this page.



1 Hierarchy of Controls - <https://www.ontario.ca/page/develop-your-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan>

- Physical Distancing
 - Ensure that staff and volunteers are able to maintain 2 metres of distance while at work, including during breaks.
 - Public Health Ontario – [Physical Distancing](#)
- Handwashing and Hand Sanitizer
 - Ensure that handwashing facilities are available or where that is impossible that hand sanitizer is available and determine appropriate placement throughout the site.
 - Public Health Ontario – [How to Wash Your Hands and How to Use Hand Sanitizer](#)
 - Provide non-touch, lined waste disposal receptacles throughout the workplace.
- Protective Equipment
 - Where physical distancing is not possible, create physical barriers or ensure that staff and volunteers have access to personal protective equipment and that they are trained on how to use it.
 - [Mask Use for Non-Healthcare Workers](#)
 - [When and How to Wear a Mask](#)
 - [Non-medical Masks and Face Coverings](#)
- Staggered Shifts
 - If necessary, stagger shifts so that staff and volunteers are able to maintain physical distance while at work and while entering and leaving the site.

- Screening
 - Encourage staff and volunteers to perform daily self-screening at home prior to coming to work using the [self-assessment tool online](#). Communicate that it is not permitted for anyone to enter the premises if they are sick or have symptoms of COVID-19.
- Procedures for People who are Sick
 - If staff or volunteers become ill while at work, they should be sent home, instructed to do a [self-assessment](#) and to follow the recommended next steps.
- Signage
 - Post signage informing staff and volunteers of symptoms of COVID-19 and to reinforce safe work practices such as screening, hand washing, physical distancing, and what to do if they become sick.
 - [Posters for Employers and Employees](#)
- Accessibility
 - In keeping with the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#), ensure that all information is available to employees in accessible formats on request.
 - [How to Make Information Accessible](#)

Update your policies

Many organizations will require workers to work in new ways and your HR and other policy documents must reflect changes to your workplace.

- Find out about your responsibilities as an employer and recent amendments to the Employment Standards Act in response to COVID-19
 - [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) and your employment standards protections](#)
- Remote work policies – while museums are closed, as they begin to reopen, and in the case that museums must close again, there will be individuals who need to continue to work remotely. Make sure that you have policies in place that outline your approach to remote work.
- Working alone on-site – it is not uncommon for museum employees to be sole employees and for museum workers to be spread out on large museum sites. However, as museums modify their operations to ensure physical distancing it may be more common for individuals to work alone or physically removed from their colleagues. Ensure that your protocols and training for working alone are in place to ensure the safety and security of staff and volunteers.
 - Public Services Health and Safety Association: [Protecting Workers Who Work Alone](#)
 - Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – [Working Alone - General](#)
 - Ensure that sign-in and sign-out protocols are in place to ensure accurate headcounts in case of emergency. This may be particularly important with individuals working on staggered or modified schedules.
- Mental health supports – the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects will continue to impact people as they resume their work at museums and as they reintegrate into the workplace.
 - [Canadian Mental Health Association - COVID-19 and mental health](#)
 - Government of Ontario - [Mental health, wellness and addictions support](#)

- Workplace Safety and Prevention Services has created a COVID-19 [Mental Health Resources](#) list of tools to help employees, including leaders, during the pandemic and in the returning to the workplace.
- Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS) and HowattHR have launched the [Psychological Safety Blog](#) as a source for information, tools and resources to help leaders protect the health, safety and wellness of their people.

Cleaning protocols

Review and update all cleaning protocols to ensure that they are consistent with public health direction.

- Government of Canada: [Cleaning and disinfecting public spaces during COVID-19](#)
- Public Health Ontario: [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#)
- Workplace Safety and Prevention Services: [Pathogen Decontamination Checklist](#)
 - Train staff on cleaning procedures and safe use of all products and equipment.
 - Ensure that staffing levels are adequate to complete required cleaning (hire additional cleaning staff if necessary) and ensure that time for new cleaning processes is reflected in workplans.
 - Equipment and supplies – ensure that cleaning equipment and supplies are stocked and that reliable sources are available to restock.
 - Government of Canada: [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\): List of disinfectants with evidence for use against COVID-19](#)

Collections Management Protocols

In most cases, it will not be possible to disinfect museum collection objects with chemical processes without the risk of permanent damage. The Canadian Conservation Institute has provided guidance on [Caring for Collections During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). Update procedures and train staff to ensure that staff and volunteers are protected, and that collections are not damaged.

- The OMA presented a [webinar with CCI to elaborate on the advice in the above publication, the recording is available online](#).

Determine the minimum requirements that need to be in place for the museum to re-open to the public

As of the writing of this document, museums in certain regions of the Province are permitted to reopen to the public. The following considerations are intended to help museums to plan for reopening when it is permitted by the Government of Ontario. This document will be updated as specific directives for safe operation of museums are released.

Questions and Considerations

- Financial
 - What resources does the museum need to meet all normal financial commitments (e.g. rent, utilities, internet, wages, etc.) as well as additional costs such as cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment?
 - What grants or subsidies need to be confirmed or received?
 - What additional equipment needs to be purchased (e.g. Plexiglas shields for reception desks, additional tools and equipment to avoid sharing among staff)?
- Staffing
 - Many museums have laid off or furloughed staff or postponed seasonal hiring. Consider how long it will take to hire or bring staff back and to train them in new cleaning protocols, emergency procedures, new ticketing software, etc.
 - Be aware that some individuals may need to remain on leave or may need to continue working from home to care for family members.
 - Consider the needs of individuals who may be more at risk than others e.g. elderly volunteers, those with underlying conditions, those whose roles put them in closer contact with others.
 - Build in time to review policies and to train staff in new visitation patterns, customer service protocols, and dealing with non-compliant visitors.
- Safety Equipment and Supplies
 - Does the museum have an adequate supply of products and materials to properly clean and disinfect all work areas?
 - Does the museum have an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (e.g. masks, gloves) for staff and volunteers if needed?
 - Does the museum have a reliable source for restocking supplies as needed?
- Physical Distancing
 - Physical distance of 2 metres must be maintained between groups of visitors, between staff members, and between visitors and staff members.
 - Physical barriers (e.g. Plexiglas shields) or personal protective equipment (e.g. masks) should be used where 2 metre distance is not possible (e.g. admission desks)
 - How can outdoor spaces be used to provide physical distancing?
- Capacity, Access, and Flow
 - Consider using a single public entrance to the building to control the number of people who enter.
 - What areas must remain inaccessible to visitors to prevent crowding or access to high-touch interactives e.g. touch screens, buttons, dress-up clothes.
 - What interactives must be removed or covered?

- How will visitors move through the museum while maintaining physical distance of 2 metres?
- How will designated routes be indicated in the space to ensure that visitors do not cross paths or encounter bottlenecks? Apply markers to the floor to indicate 2 metre distance and direction of travel.
- Ticketing
 - When museums reopen it may be necessary or recommended to implement timed entry to the museum to control capacity and ensure physical distancing.
 - Does your existing point of sale software include timed ticketing capabilities?
 - Can you proceed with a phone-based reservation system for booking visits?
 - Does your website allow for online payment or will visitors pay on-site?
 - What online tools do you have available to you that can manage online bookings?
 - Consider cashless or no-touch options for payment of admission fees or donations.
- Interpretation
 - How will your interpretation be impacted by physical distancing, no-touch requirements, or staff shortages?
 - How can signage, audio, video, or apps be used to communicate interpretive messages to visitors?
- Communication
 - What updates need to be made to your website and other communication vehicles to let the public know how they can visit your site?
 - What signage must be created to communicate new policies and protocols for visitors? Post all policies and reminders about hygiene and physical distancing practices at entrances.
 - Ontario Public Health [COVID-19 Symptoms Poster for Visitors](#)
 - What training must staff and volunteers receive to ensure that they are delivering consistent messaging to visitors?
- Accessibility
 - How will signage, directions, and interpretation be made accessible to people with disabilities?
 - How will changes to how people access your site be communicated?
- Handwashing and Hand Sanitizer
 - Ensure that handwashing facilities are available or where that is impossible that hand sanitizer is available and determine appropriate placement throughout the site.
 - Public Health Ontario – [How to Wash Your Hands and How to Use Hand Sanitizer](#)
 - Provide non-touch, lined waste disposal receptacles throughout the museum.
- Cleaning Protocols
 - Review and update all cleaning protocols to ensure that they are consistent with public health direction.
 - Government of Canada: [Cleaning and disinfecting public spaces during COVID-19](#)

- Public Health Ontario: [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#)
 - Workplace Safety and Prevention Services: [Pathogen Decontamination Checklist](#)
 - Train staff on cleaning procedures and safe use of all products and equipment.
 - Ensure that staffing levels are adequate to complete required cleaning (hire additional cleaning staff if necessary) and ensure that time for new cleaning processes is reflected in workplans.
 - Equipment and supplies – ensure that cleaning equipment and supplies are stocked and that reliable sources are available to restock.
 - Government of Canada: [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\): List of disinfectants with evidence for use against COVID-19](#)
- Update Emergency Plans
 - Ensure that emergency plans are updated to reflect new work patterns and protocols.
 - Ensure that emergency plans include pandemic response protocols in case the museum must close again in future.
 - The Alberta Museums Association [Membership Advisory Managing Your Museum's Pandemic Response PART1: Activating Your Emergency Response](#) provides some guidance and links to resources from [HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums](#).
 - Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety - [Flu and Infectious Disease Outbreaks Business Continuity Plan](#)
 - Ontario Ministry of Health [COVID-19 Guidance: Workplace Outbreaks](#) provides information intended for Public Health Units, but it also includes useful information for employers.
 - Canadian Conservation Institute [Risk management for heritage collections](#)
 - The Canadian Conservation Institute CCI Note [Closing a Museum for the Winter](#) is a good resource in case of future closure.