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# Considerations When Re-Opening Museums

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With the outbreak of COVID-19 earlier this year, and the subsequent order to close non-essential businesses, museums across the province closed their doors to the public. These measures to discourage gatherings, and to encourage social distancing, and self isolation have proven effective in helping to flatten the curve of the spread of infection. Although the doors may have been closed to museums, galleries, science centres, historic houses, and so much more, community engagement has reached new heights. Resources have been uploaded to websites and programs and collections are being shared online and across social media. The heritage sector is doing its part to help reduce infection rates and alleviate the stress of being “housebound”.

With the release of a tentative Re-Open Saskatchewan plan, museums now need to consider what next steps they need to take in order to re-open to the public and maintain a safe and healthy environment for staff, volunteers, and visitors.

## **Step 1:** Isolation

As counterintuitive as it may seem, before you consider re-opening your institution to the public, please close it, in its entirety for a minimum of 9 days. While your organization may have been closed to the public, please think about who, in the interim, has had access to it. Are you working remotely but still going on-site every few days to check the mail, reset computers, monitor pest control? This period of isolation is only effective if absolutely no one is allowed on-site. Once everyone has vacated the building allow it to sit isolated for a minimum of 9 days. The reason for this is simple. The COVID-19 virus can survive on certain surfaces for varying amounts of time at room temperature for up to 9 days.<sup>1</sup>

During this isolation period, it is important that you continue to monitor the building(s) and check the perimeters, to maintain a presence to discourage any unlawful behaviour towards your organization.

## **Step 2:** Staff Re-Entry

Social distancing practises are still in full effect, so you do not want your whole staff or volunteers to return all at once. Identify a limited number of people from your organization who will oversee re-entry into your facility after the initial isolation to prepare for re-opening. These few people will be responsible for cleaning the public areas prior to re-opening to the public, as well as identifying what is required to ensure a safe re-opening, i.e. hand sanitizer accessible for visitors and staff, appropriate cleaning supplies on-site, enough personal protective equipment (PPE)<sup>2</sup> for staff and volunteers, etc.

**Please Do Not Clean or Disinfect Heritage Collections or Materials.** The Isolation period should have been enough to render any virus on your collections inert, and it is the safest means of caring for your collections.

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1 For the COVID-19 virus persistence on particular materials please see the NCPTT video “COVID-19 Basics: Disinfecting Cultural Resources” Posted by Mary Striegel, 25/March/2020 <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-disinfecting-cultural-resources/> and for more information on environmental conditions (temperature, RH) please refer to CCI technical note “Caring for Heritage Collections during the COVID-19 Pandemic” 17/April/2020

2 For instruction on the proper donning and removal of, and types of PPE please see the NCPTT video “COVID-19 Basics: Personal Protective Equipment” <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-personal-protective-equipment-ppe/>

### **Step 3:** Re-open to the Public

Museums and galleries are part of Phase 4 of the Re-Open Saskatchewan Plan; there is no fixed date yet for this to happen. However, having a plan in place to assist with re-opening will be beneficial when Phase 4 is carried out. This reopening will not be typical; there will still be health protocols in place, and these considerations will impact the day-to-day operations. Some activities may have to be suspended or altered to align with necessary social distancing standards including remaining a minimum of 2m/6ft apart.

Minimize hand-to-hand exchanges. Do not accept cash transactions, process payments by debit or credit card only. If this is not an option, consider waiving admission fees in favour of a donation to a donation box to avoid any unnecessary hand exchanges. If you must handle cash transactions, wash hands frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Similar practices should be applied to office documents, like contracts; make things as digital as possible.

Do not shake hands; instead encourage other non-contact greetings.

Simply because your organization is open to the public does not mean face-to-face interactions are advisable. Whenever possible, hold staff or other business meetings in another format, either online or via telephone. Encourage those that can work remotely to continue to work remotely, as this helps to minimize unnecessary contact.

Preferably, work stations (phones, computers, etc.), whenever possible, should not be shared. If they need to be shared, stagger when people will be using the station and thoroughly clean between uses. Regardless of whether spaces are shared or not, regular cleaning and disinfecting of personal and public spaces should be carried out.

Staggering staff returns and work schedules to minimize the number of people on-site is strongly encouraged.

Other considerations to help maintain social distancing are staggering admission times and limiting the number of people inside your facility at any one time (staff, volunteers, and visitors).

### **Step 4:** Continuous Monitoring – staff, public, programming, exhibitions, collections

Have staff report on how they are feeling, and how their families (or anyone they are quarantined with) are doing. If anyone has been sick or had a fever in the last three days, ask them to stay home. Check in with them daily. Or at the very least on days when they are scheduled to come on-site.

Maintain social distancing: do not allow staff or volunteers to congregate, and stagger breaks.

Implement cleaning schedules for shared, public, and personal spaces.

Regarding collections and exhibitions during these uncertain times: consider extending the loan period for materials loaned to another institution before the outbreak or re-visit the necessity of loan requests you had made. Materials coming into your institution, whether new acquisitions or incoming or returning loans, should be isolated immediately for 9 days. Also consider exhibit interactives, i.e. touch screens, open storage, etc., anything that encourages the public to touch should be temporarily removed.

It's important to maintain good record keeping. Every day have your front desk staff record who is on duty, where they are in the museum, record visitors, request both names and addresses (community) in the event of having an active case of COVID-19 after opening, this information could be invaluable in contact tracing potential carriers and mitigating impact. See the printable example at the end of this guide.

## Resources:

Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM):

"Closed by COVID-19: A practical guide for managers of heritage collections that are closed at short notice because of an epidemic or pandemic" 27/March/2020

<https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/Closed%20by%20COVID19%20-%20ver%201.1%20-%2027Mar2020.pdf>

Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI):

"Caring for Heritage Collections during the COVID-19 Pandemic" 17/April/2020

[https://www.cac-accr.ca/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2020/04/cii\\_covid-19\\_en\\_2020-04-17.pdf](https://www.cac-accr.ca/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2020/04/cii_covid-19_en_2020-04-17.pdf)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

"Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility"

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fdisinfecting-building-facility.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fdisinfecting-building-facility.html)

Government of Canada:

"Cleaning and disinfecting public spaces (COVID-19)"

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/cleaning-disinfecting-public-spaces.html>

"Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers (COVID-19): List of hand sanitizers authorized by Health Canada"

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/hand-sanitizer.html>

Government of Saskatchewan:

"Re-Open Saskatchewan" 23/April/2020

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/re-open-saskatchewan-plan/re-open-saskatchewan>

National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT):

"COVID-19 Basics: Disinfecting Cultural Resources" Posted by Mary Striegel, 25/March/2020

<https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-disinfecting-cultural-resources/>

"COVID-19 Basics: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)" Mary Striegel, 31/March/2020

<https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-personal-protective-equipment-ppe/>

"COVID-19 Basics: Re-Entry to Cultural Sites" Posted by Mary Striegel, 6/April/2020

<https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-re-entry-to-cultural-sites/>



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