



Membership February COVID-19 call report and guidance.

As a result of a COVID-19 outbreak and community spread in the Northeast Avalon region of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Chief Medical of Health initiated a special measures order on February 12, 2021 to put the province under a General Alert Level 5. The Special Measure Order (SMO) is [here](#).

Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL) responded quickly to share information with its members and organize a call for members with a representative from the Department of Health and Community Services. 125 people joined the call on February 17, representing nearly 100 municipalities. Members were encouraged to submit questions in advance. In total, MNL received 26 questions (listed at the end) grouped broadly under 7 thematic areas, including:

- Alert levels and special measures
- Implications for municipalities under Alert Level 5
- Vaccinations
- Transmission
- Case awareness by community
- Elections
- General

MNL followed up with both the Department of Health and Community Services, and the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Municipalities (ECCM) after the call to confirm municipal related guidance. Below were key areas for discussion on the call and related recommendations.

Municipal offices and council meetings under Alert Level 5

MNL is recommending that, if at all possible, municipal offices should be closed to the public and that staff work from home. If this is not possible, it is recommended that municipalities adhere to all public health guidelines regarding sanitization, PPE, physical distancing and gatherings and an appointment-based process if necessary. Essential service delivery should continue. Municipalities need to continue to function. They should strive to find ways to ensure residents are able to access services and make payments with minimal or no contact. Online service delivery for business functions and council meetings is recommended. However, we recognize that this is not possible or practical in all situations. Members who are looking for support can reach out to Brad Power, Director of Programs at bpower@municipalnl.ca.

We have been advised through our engagement with Public Health that they recognize that It is a local council decision to close municipal offices to the public and/or to find alternative ways to safely provide key services following public health guidelines.

MNL is recommending that council meetings be held, if possible, virtually. If this is not possible, in-person meetings of no more than 5 people in total can take place provided all public health measures can be met. In both virtual and in person situations, meetings must still be broadcasted live and available publicly.

Status of Playgrounds under current Alert Level 5 Special Measures Order

Municipal parks and playgrounds can be open under the current Special Measures Order. Other in-door recreation facilities have been mandated to close, including those operated by municipalities. The decision to open municipal playgrounds and keep them open is at the discretion of local councils. Patrons should adhere to public health guidelines. Should councils become concerned about gatherings in these spaces, they may also choose to close them. Public Health will support municipalities who choose to do so.

Recommendations for essential workers as it relates to self-isolation.

Several members have asked questions regarding essential workers and self-isolation requirements. MNL has received the following guidance from Public Health: In situations where workers that are self-isolating provide critical services, the Public Health team is comfortable with them breaking self-isolation to do the work by themselves, provided that there is no other option available, and they are not symptomatic. They would need to return to self-isolation as soon as the work is completed.

Recommendations for workers who share vehicles.

It is recommended the employees use separate vehicles if possible. However, Public Health recognizes that this may be a challenge. In cases where individual vehicles are not possible, it is recommended that other public health measures be put in place, such as physical distances, tight fitting PPE with two layers, air vents, open windows, time limitations and/or barriers installed within the vehicle. PPE is not intended to replace physical distancing. Traveling separately is the ideal situation.

Length of Alert Level 5 and subsequent movements between alert levels

It is anticipated that the current Alert Level 5 will last beyond two weeks. Movement between the Alert Levels (and the timing of de-escalation) will depend on the current outbreak and how it plays out. Discussions in Public Health are ongoing.

Travel restrictions from the Newfoundland to Labrador

At the time of the call and as a result of the Alert 5 Special Measures Order, it was recommended that travel only occur for essential reasons. No other restrictions were in place at the time.

Travel between communities

There are no special measures order to prohibit travel between communities. Public Health is asking residents to reduce travel as much as possible and to do so only for essential reasons. The virus only moves when you move.

Masks in municipal buildings

Mask wearing is recommended as much as possible, especially around people not within your household. A mandatory mask special measures order was issued on August 24, 2020. It can be found [here](#). Under this order, there are exemptions. MNL has provided additional guidance related to masks, in consultation with Public Health. That guidance can be found [here](#).

Vaccines

Provincial Government vaccine information is updated every Wednesday [here](#). Vaccine plans are ongoing and are reliant on supply. Detailed information on Phase 2 of the vaccine plan, including who will be considered as an essential worker, is not yet available.

Community case information

Local leaders will not be advised by Public Health of outbreaks in their communities. The recommendation is that municipal governments work with local community groups and offer your support through them.

Municipal Elections

MNL is working with its members, ECCM and other partners on a safe 2021 municipal election plan. More information will be forthcoming in the following weeks.

Questions submitted for Public Health

Alert levels and special measures

- Will the transfer to the various alert levels be 2 weeks for each level? Trying to determine if ice should be removed from the arena.
- Will we be going back through the alert levels in order or is it possible to go from five to three depending on the situation
- Will there be any new restrictions for travel to Labrador from the island such as 14-day isolation, point of entry testing?
- Do you anticipate this lock down to extend longer than two weeks?

Implications for municipalities under Alert Level 5

- Should Council members be meeting in person? In our case it would mean 6 councillors and 2 staff.
- I am looking for clarification please. We are only a 4-member council and with our clerk makes us 5. Under the new measures are we able to proceed with an in-person council meeting?
- Please confirm if Playgrounds are required to be closed as there is some confusion on this.
- If you have an employee that requested to work from home and the employer is able to let them work from home can you deny their request? Note: The Town employees are able to maintain social distancing safely? (There are only 4 employees in the building, and we are closed to the Public).
- Can staff still work together in the municipal building while maintaining social distancing and remain closed to the public?
- I know that MNL is recommending that Town Office's be closed to the public. Am I correct to understand that this is a recommendation only and that Town Offices can remain open since it is deemed an essential service but must follow the max 5 people gathering rule with strict social distancing in place?
- Outside maintenance staff can they be in the same vehicle with each other if they wear their PPE? What PPE is required?
- Our Municipality has only two Public Works employees. We have issued a call for casual workers on several occasions to no avail. Our major concern surrounds our pumphouse operations. No other contractor or individual has the specific knowledge of our town that is required to effectively deal with our pumphouse operations on a daily basis (and we do have issues constantly). If we are somehow able

to get a third party to perform the work, we fear that it may result in some major issues with our water supply. Our questions are:

- If one or both of our outside employees are required to self-isolate for any reason (providing they are well of course) would it be permissible to have them separately, in a dedicated vehicle (without making contact with any other individuals) take a direct daily trip to our pumphouse to perform required tasks?
- If one or both of our outside employees are required to self-isolate for any reason would it be permissible for them to perform snow clearing duties as long as each only use the same piece of equipment each time? NOTE: We have an agreement with our local gas station whereby our workers do not have to leave their vehicles to get fuel, station will pump and invoice the town directly.
- NOTE: This is not a large city whereby I understand that such arrangements cannot be accommodated. However, smaller municipalities have the ability to make such arrangements in a very safe manner and could save us from encountering issues like loss of water (which no one wants, especially during a pandemic).
- We are wondering if you have any clarification on the mandatory use of masks in our municipal buildings? Some people suggest that we do not have the authority to enforce or advise people that they must wear face masks. On the other hand, we have two motions of Council one for the Arts Centre with revised rules for COVID 19 outlining things like no food, capacity restrictions and use of masks and also another motion for our arena with the adoption of our Return to Play Document. This clarification will be helpful to us as we start to increase our messaging to residents and patrons with the current spike in cases on the Avalon.

Vaccinations

- Do you have an update on vaccines?
- Does NL have a defined plan for the Vaccine roll out? If so, what is it?
- Can you still be a carrier once vaccinated?

Transmission

- Any recommendations concerning the variant compared to the original strain?
- If a person tested positive and lives with other individuals why don't they have to self- isolate too as the virus is airborne?

Case awareness by community

- If a Community member tests positive, can the community know of the cases. (Not the names, just the numbers)
- Would our Municipality be informed if we have Positive cases in our area or so-called clusters?

Elections

- Municipal elections are set to take place in September 2021. Given that the vaccine roll out is not anticipated to be complete until mid-September, what is public health's guidance on carrying out these elections?
- Town offices are often the only place in smaller communities where residents can access a scanner and/or fax machine; they interact with town staff to support administrative activities that for many of them may be challenging or impossible because they lack access to technology or do not know how to use it. This is also the case for many of the seniors in our communities. What is the recommended course of action for municipalities who have residents requesting municipal support for accessing ballots?

General (please note these may not be questions for public health specifically)

- People have asked re: travel between communities (This is both general and also pertains to our municipalities). What is the public health advice on travel among and between our communities?
- If an employee has to stay home an isolate for 14 days should they go on CERB or should they use their sick leave? (This may be a question for labour).
- Thoughts on working from home for parents with multiple children and the new virtual learning program (For discussion – perhaps not a public health question).
- What progress has been made to ensure connectivity within rural areas? We need to be able to conduct business remotely (This may be a question for other departments).