

NB Heritage Sites & Covid-19:

A Guide to Collections Safety, Staff & Volunteer Re-Entry, and Visitor Re-Entry



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Safety First

The Covid-19 pandemic is an ever evolving situation. Be mindful of all provincial and federal States of Emergency and what they entail, follow recommendations of local, [provincial](#) and [federal](#) public health offices, be aware of and use personal [protective equipment](#) (PPE) as prescribed and recommended.



How to Use this Guide

When opening your community museum during the Covid-19 pandemic, this guide offers information and help to understand the impact of Covid-19 on collections management and conservation. It is hoped that this guide will also provide a framework for planning and creating:

- safe work practices for collections
- a safe working environment for staff and volunteers on site
- a safe environment for visitors when historic sites open to the public.

Once established, these procedures may have to be stopped, restarted and repeated if museums are required to close and reopen throughout the season in response to the extension or re-imposition of a State of Emergency.

The advice given here may not be suitable in all situations. If you require further information or feedback, **please reach out to the contacts at the end of this guide.**

It is important to note that Covid-19 will not harm museum collections. Handling collections during a pandemic, however, increases the risk of collections becoming contaminated and an intermediary to infect people. Though risk of infection from a contaminated collection object may be slight, fear of potentially contaminated heritage collections may inspire ill conceived, overly aggressive cleaning and sanitization that unjustifiably damages heritage collections.

With all of this in mind, the following are prime directives during the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Do not wash or disinfect heritage collections
- Wear [masks](#) to limit non-symptomatic spread of the virus

- [Practice rigorous hand hygiene](#): wash your hands frequently (do not use hand sanitizers when working with collections), wear clean gloves (dispose of gloves with care to avoid cross contamination)
- Take extra measures to restrict public and non-essential access to collections areas and objects
- Update information as best practices evolve with changing recommendations from public health and share it throughout the organizational structure

1. Collections Management & Conservation

Whether heritage sites are open or closed to staff, volunteers or the public, collections management and conservation protocols remain in place to address secure access, security of collections, required supplies, monitoring and general housekeeping.

a. Entry and self-assessment

All staff should do a [self-assessment](#) before entering the facility:

Do not come to work sick!

b. Access

Restrict access to collections whether on exhibit or not and whether your museum is open or closed to the public. This may involve limiting access to storage rooms or exhibit spaces to designated individuals. The purpose is to secure all areas, and to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus through casual or unnecessary interaction with each other and collections. Inform individual staff if Covid-19 pandemic protocols have resulted in a change of procedure or right of access to collections items.

c. Lockdown

If the facility has been closed for [nine days or more](#) you can presume that the facility and its contents are virus free. If people have visited the facility during lockdown, familiarize yourself with the frequency and route of any staff or security who have been monitoring the facility to identify areas of potential Covid-19 contamination.

d. Supplies and PPE

Gather supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) in advance such as masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, wipes, new mops, brooms and dusters, paper towels, accessible garbage receptacles, [soap](#) (hand and for surface cleaning), source of hot water.

Have enough mops or mop heads to replace mops after use in one area before moving to a new area to avoid cross contamination. Please refer to resources for

guidance about [preventing cross contamination](#) during regular cleaning/maintenance, see below.

e. PPE in practice

Wear [masks](#) when working to protect furnishings, surfaces and colleagues; wash hands frequently and wear gloves; [change gloves](#) as required to prevent cross contamination.

- i. Protocols and PPE: use masks and gloves or clean hands frequently as per public health recommendations, when working with collections. Note that sanitizers can leave a residue on surfaces so they are not recommended when handling collections. Wear masks when handling collections or working in shared spaces. Leaving the mask on at all times minimizes the chance of touching one's face. If only one designated individual is entering, checking or working, the risk of contamination/infection is low; as more individuals have access to the site, the risk of contamination/infection increases.

f. Security & Monitoring

- i. **If open to the public** restrict or limit access; close areas where social distancing cannot be achieved; inform the public of the health and safety risk; enforce no touching rules; remove temptations; define circulation routes and monitor.
- ii. **If closed to the public** (ie. lockdown) restrict access overall and schedule checks by a designated individual. Sites and collections should be checked at least weekly, daily if possible and practical. Establish a route to follow and a checklist. Note in the checklist any deviation from the planned route.
- iii. If necessary, establish a ventilation protocol and schedule to mitigate soaring temps and humidity, ie. run fans, open windows, or run de-humidifiers to encourage air circulation and prevent mould growth. These schedules and protocols should be incorporated into procedural documents for indeterminate closure or lockdown during the summer months.

g. Housekeeping – Collections vs. Common Areas

Do not disinfect or initiate more elaborate cleaning of the collection than usually done when opening. Rely on persons with collections experience and familiarity with a site. **The use of professional cleaning services who are unfamiliar with collections and preservation protocols is NOT recommended.**

If your site has been closed all winter with little or no access by staff, volunteers or visitors, collections are not contaminated with Covid-19. Once anyone accesses the site, however, there is a renewed risk of the virus being present. Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of all common areas and high touch surfaces. The Canadian Conservation Institute currently advises that the virus remains active and contractible on surfaces up to 9 days.

- i. Most seasonal and some year-round museums and heritage sites have a procedure for spring cleaning. Follow your regular opening procedure while practicing Covid-19 protocols of distancing, handwashing, and wearing masks and gloves.
 - a. [Do not wash or disinfect heritage collections](#). If there are any exceptional concerns about cleaning collection items including heritage surfaces and textiles, please consult a conservator (see contacts below)
 - b. Equipment: New mops and brooms are recommended; [separate clean from dirty](#); wash mop heads; provide a protocol for cleaning or disposal of contaminated equipment and materials. When working in the museum during a pandemic/epidemic, wear masks and gloves and wash hands frequently to prevent possible contamination of the collection by staff during opening.
 - c. Restrict and monitor staff or volunteer access to the sites even when not accessible to the public.
- ii. If you are unsure if heritage collection objects are contaminated (unusual if all other procedures are followed, but not impossible) or if they are exposed to a Covid-19 positive visitor or employee do not wet clean or sanitize collection material. Instead, leave in situ and restrict handling or access for 9 days. Alternatively, remove collections objects to a secure location and isolate for 9 days.
 - a. Use appropriate PPE when handling potentially contaminated collection material.
 - b. If removing collection items to a secure location for isolation, wrap them for transport.
 - c. If a returned loan or pending acquisition arrives, wrap and monitor per usual pest management protocol (may include freezing), then isolate for 9 days.

2. Staff & Volunteer Re-Entry

As the situation evolves and provincial and federal authorities initiate staged re-openings, heritage operations will resume. Consequently, increasing numbers of people

will be entering your sites. It is recommended that staff and volunteer entry does not coincide with public entry to provide staff with time to refine new procedures and protocols. Update your plan as best practices evolve with changing recommendations from public health.

a. Establish a Re-entry Committee

Set up a committee, (likely a Board and Staff subcommittee), with defined roles and responsibilities that include: re-entry plan; health, safety and security protocols; training of staff and volunteers; inventory and replacement of supplies; housekeeping protocols; communication plan for staff/volunteers and others including media; authority structure (who is in charge and ultimately responsible); circulation of updated contact information. The Re-entry Committee's work is not finished on the first day of re-entry but continues indefinitely. Consequently, the re-entry committee will keep all staff up to date on any deviation or change in procedure or policy as necessary.

b. Signage and assessments

All staff should do a [self-assessment](#) before entering the facility.

Do not come to work sick!

Post [signage](#) at all entry points, establish protocol for [live or self-screening](#) with recommended questions. See GNB for templates, signage and screening questions.

c. Limited access

Establish who is required to be on site. Is the number required more or less than usual? Can everyone be accommodated within the parameters of distancing requirements? Consider off site work for some. Consider a staggered or alternating schedule of days on site and days off site. Notify staff and volunteers if Covid-19 pandemic protocols have resulted in a change in accessing collection objects and areas within a site.

d. Supplies and PPE

Gather supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) in advance such as masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, wipes, new mops, brooms and dusters, paper towels, accessible garbage receptacles, [soap](#) (hand and for surface cleaning), source of hot water.

Have enough mops or mop heads to replace mops after use in one area before moving to a new area to avoid cross contamination. Please refer to resources for

guidance about [preventing cross contamination](#) during regular cleaning/maintenance, see below.

e. PPE in practice

Wear [masks](#) when working to protect furnishings, surfaces and colleagues; wash hands frequently and wear gloves, [change gloves](#) as required to prevent cross contamination. Note that sanitizers can leave a residue on surfaces so they are not recommended when handling collections. Wear masks when handling collections or working in shared spaces. Leaving the mask on at all times minimizes the chance of touching one's face. If only one designated individual is entering, checking or working, the risk of contamination/infection is low; as more individuals have access to the site, the risk of contamination/infection increases.

f. Housekeeping Protocols for Staff or Common Areas

Most seasonal and some year-round museums and heritage sites have a procedure for spring cleaning. Follow your regular opening procedure while practicing Covid-19 protocols of distancing, handwashing, and wearing masks and gloves. Reply on persons with collections experience and familiarity with a site. **The use of professional cleaning services who are unfamiliar with collections and preservation protocols is NOT recommended.**

- i. Equipment: New mops and brooms are recommended; [separate clean from dirty](#); wash mop heads; provide a protocol for cleaning or disposal of contaminated equipment and materials. When working in the museum during a pandemic/epidemic, wear masks and gloves and wash hands frequently to prevent possible contamination of the collection by staff during opening.
- ii. Restrict and monitor staff or volunteer access to the sites even when not accessible to the public.
- iii. Establish a protocol for the cleaning and disinfecting of common areas and frequently touched hard surfaces such as knobs, switches, railings, sign in books, pens/pencils, countertops and table tops, kitchens and washrooms.
- iv. Establish an accessible cleaning products station. Rather than being hidden in closets or under counters to prevent unnecessary contact with knobs and drawers, create a specific open area where all products are easily accessible, neat, tidy, and clean!
- v. Create a detailed task checklist that outlines clearly stated protocols and places them on a schedule.

g. Work areas/stations

Evaluate work areas for staff and volunteers to ensure safe distancing, traffic patterns, accessibility and ease of cleaning. Safe and efficient movement is a challenge in heritage buildings with small rooms, doorways and hallways, but it must be considered. Any limitations will inform parameters for working on site and suggest appropriate on site vs. off site work projects. Consider staggered scheduling of staff to ease the challenges.

h. Ventilation

Ensure proper ventilation of work spaces for fresh air quality but also as temperatures and humidity rise over the summer months: fans, air conditioners, open windows.

i. Other Projects

Consider this time as [an opportunity to work on projects](#) that are often less of a priority when visitors are present or when employees and volunteers are occupied with delivering programs and events: cataloguing; digitization; re-housing collections; collections and program planning; general maintenance; online projects and training.

j. Enforcement of Rules

Staff and volunteers must be well [trained and understand the impact of the new requirements and protocols](#). This is not the time for shortcuts and while feedback is welcomed, it must be part of a larger discussion so that protocols are consistent across an organization. Staff and volunteers must be trained on how to handle non-compliance and other difficult situations with colleagues, should they arise.

3. Visitor Re-Entry

After a lockdown, heritage sites will be allowed to open to visitors again. Local campaigns and staycation concepts encourage engagement with arts, culture and heritage. In addition to the preceding considerations, additional protocols are recommended in order to achieve a safe visitor experience during the Covid-19 pandemic. These include:

a. Re-entry Committee

If not done already, establish a re-entry committee: define roles, responsibilities, policies and procedures; establish parameters for ongoing monitoring, evaluation and alteration as the situation changes. The Re-entry Committee's work is not finished on the first day of re-entry but continues indefinitely.

Consequently, the re-entry committee will keep all staff up to date on any deviation or change in procedure or policy as necessary.

b. Signage and assessments

- i. Post [signage](#) at all entry points, establish a protocol for [live or self-screening](#) with recommended questions. See GNB for templates, signage and screening questions.
- ii. Consider whether to provide masks to visitors or whether it is a requirement for entry. ***People observed to be symptomatic may be refused entry.***
- iii. Establish a protocol whereby site and visitor information is exchanged in case tracing becomes necessary after a positive test by staff, volunteer or visitor. Visitor information should be collected by the site host to avoid multiple handling of pens, pencils and lists, and maintained in a secure place due to privacy considerations.

c. Housekeeping

[Training](#) staff and volunteers and having them understand cleaning and disinfecting protocols is critical. Public access requires more frequent attention to common areas and high touch surfaces; the presence of visitors may require increased attention in areas of the site rarely used by staff but commonly used by visitors. Reply on persons with collections experience and familiarity with a site. **The use of professional cleaning services who are unfamiliar with collections and preservation protocols is NOT recommended.**

- i. Spring cleaning may take on additional significance. A space may not require spring cleaning for staff and volunteers to perform their duties, but may require it if a site is open to the public. As above, follow your regular opening procedure while practicing Covid-19 protocols of distancing, handwashing, masks and gloves.
- ii. Daily housekeeping tasks become more frequent as visitors access a site. Entryways, pathways, parking and interior traffic routes require more attention as they are used by visitors.
- iii. [Cleaning and disinfecting](#) of common areas and frequently touched hard surfaces such as knobs, switches, railings, sign in books, pens/pencils, countertops and table tops, kitchens and washrooms is extremely important to reduce risk of virus contamination. As noted, frequency increases with public access. Whenever [feasible](#) these surfaces should be disinfected after every use.
- iv. Will washrooms be available to visitors? Establish responsibility and protocols for cleaning and disinfecting.

- v. Establish an accessible cleaning products station where all products are easily accessible, neat, tidy, and clean!
- vi. Create a detailed task checklist that outlines clearly stated protocols that are done on an hourly/daily schedule. With public access, the checklist may become more detailed than one for staff and volunteers.

d. Safety & Security vs. Interpretation

Heritage sites must plan how visitors will interact safely with staff, volunteers, collections and exhibitions. For example, guided tours may not be possible in tight heritage spaces when distancing must be maintained. At the same time, visitors must be monitored for security purposes. Hands on displays and touchable programs need to be re-visited. There are several possibilities to mitigate the risks.

- i. Limit the number of visitors to a safe maximum.
- ii. Close spaces where distancing protocols or monitoring are not possible, a second floor, an outbuilding, or separate site, for example.
- iii. Limit hours of operation to reduce interaction, facilitate distancing and to make cleaning and disinfecting protocols practical. This could result in a reduction in daily hours or days of the week.
- iv. [Alternative interpretative plans](#) must be considered. For example, more signage may be used to facilitate self-guided tours, outdoor interpretation with safe distancing and virtual interpretation of site themes using videos or social media may all be used to preserve social distancing, eradicate touching and reduce close interaction between visitors and interpreters.

e. Visitor PPE

Determine whether any PPE will be required or provided by the site.

f. Admission Fees & Sales

Consider options for limiting cash exchanges such as online ticketing in advance, admission by donation to a box, or even free admission. For shop sales, consider e-transfer or online payment via Paypal.

g. Visitors and Collections Access

Researchers regularly request access to heritage collections and supporting documentation. Consider feasibility and how to provide this service while practicing safe distancing, PPE (masks and gloves), security of collections, and isolation of collections and supporting documents before and after access. Consider a log of date, time, visitors and the resources that were accessed.

Avoid hand sanitizer when handling collections as it may leave a residue, particularly on paper based collections. Handwashing is recommended.

h. Food & Beverage

Food and beverage sales, either restaurant or as part of a special event, should be done in accordance with public health recommendations.

i. Enforcement of Rules

As described above, staff and volunteers must be [well trained and understand the impact of new requirements and protocols](#). This is not the time for shortcuts and while feedback is welcomed, it must be part of a larger discussion so that protocols are consistent across your organization. Staff and volunteers must also be trained on how to respond to non-compliance and other difficult situations with visitors, should they arise.

4. Preparing for the Future

Covid-19 will be with us for a long time and progress toward “return-to-normal” may be reversed from time to time. We need to be prepared for any reversals.

a. Prevention of Re-contamination or Cross Contamination

Have a good plan and follow it. Mistakes may happen but plan ahead to eliminate or mitigate as many problems as possible. Follow the established guidelines for PPE and cleaning. Keep staff and volunteers trained and informed.

b. Symptoms or Positive Test

Plan in advance for the possibility that staff, volunteers or visitors may manifest symptoms or test positive for Covid-19. Make everyone aware of the protocol for intervention and mitigation of the risk to those on site. Have procedures in place to close or isolate spaces, notify all staff, leadership of the organization, public health and the general public regarding a virus related closure of a site. Sites and visitors should exchange contact information for tracing should a positive test be confirmed.

c. Re-Lockdown

[Restrictions](#) may relax over the coming weeks and months, allowing access to sites. Nonetheless, prepare for subsequent declarations of provincial or national States of Emergency and the possibility that museums, heritage sites and parks may have to [close once again](#). Prepare now for work at home projects, develop communication plans and most importantly, re-visit the beginning of this document to plan for securing sites and collections.

d. Update Disaster Management Plan

Disaster plans help sites prepare for and plan response to floods, fires, and weather events, but pandemics may not be part of your current document. Adapt and learn from the experience of Covid-19 by updating [Disaster Management Plans](#) to include the risk of a viral pandemic and the response required.

5. Resources

Contact Us With Your Questions!

We wish to share our expertise and advice in helping work through this challenging time.

<https://www.facebook.com/nbmmnb/>

Email: info@nbm-mnb.ca (New Brunswick Museum)



Association Heritage New Brunswick:

506-454-3561

info@amnb.ca

Canadian Conservation Institute: 1-866-998-3721 Ext. 0

Government of New Brunswick:

- COVID-19 operational plan guide

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/covid-19/covid-op-plan-guide.pdf>

- NB's Recovery Plan

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/corporate/promo/covid-19/recovery.html>

- Poster: PLEASE DO NOT ENTER THE FACILITY WITHOUT ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS (Bilingual)

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/h-s/pdf/ScreeningEF.pdf>

- Poster: Public Health Advice - PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM GETTING SICK

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/h-s/pdf/en/CDC/PosterCL.pdf>

- Cleaning and Disinfection for COVID-19

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/h-s/pdf/CDCOVIDE.pdf>

GNB: Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health Public Health

- Protect Yourself and Others

https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory_diseases/coronavirus/protect-yourself-and-others.html

- Coronavirus

https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory_diseases/coronavirus.html

- Covid-19 self assessment

https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory_diseases/coronavirus/coronavirusexposure.html#/app/symptom-checker/guides/399/what-to-do

GNB: Worksafe NB:

- Embracing the New Normal

<https://www.worksafenb.ca/media/60996/embracing-the-new-normal.pdf>

- Respiratory viruses and the workplace

https://www.worksafenb.ca/media/60816/respiratory_viruses_and_the_workplace.pdf

Government of Canada - Health:

- Coronavirus Disease

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

- Non-medical masks and face coverings

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>

- Hard surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers (COVID-19)

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

- Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): How to remove disposable gloves

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/video/covid-19-how-to-take-off-disposable-gloves.html>

World Health Organization (WHO):

- Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

Center for Disease Control (CDC):

- Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/cleaning-disinfecting-decision-tool.html>

International Council of Museums (ICOM):

- Covid-19 Recommendations for the conservation of museum collections

<https://icom.museum/en/news/recommendations-for-the-conservation-of-museum-collections/>

- Covid-19 Museums and the end of lockdown: ensuring the safety of the public and staff

<https://icom.museum/en/news/museums-and-end-of-lockdown-ensuring-the-safety-of-the-public-and-staff/>

Canadian Conservation Institute:

- Caring for Heritage Collections during the COVID-19 Pandemic

https://www.cac-accr.ca/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2020/04/ci_covid-19_en_2020-04-17.pdf

- CCI Notes 14/1 Emergency Preparedness for Cultural Institutions

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cci-icc/documents/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/14-1-eng.pdf?WT.contentAuthority=4.4.10>

- CCI Notes 1/3 Closing a Seasonal Museum

<https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/closing-museum-winter.html>

Nova Scotia Museums Association, et al:

- Supporting seasonal staff through COVID-19: A Quick Guide for Canadian Museums

https://ansm.ns.ca/Documents/Supporting%20Seasonal%20Staff%20During%20COVID-19.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3a3MYTahJUICnarQSfq3Ue7G4jEGSfd5nUFWyF7g_8kMcRw29nkob518k

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS):

- Mitigating COVID-19 When Managing Paper-Based, Circulating, and Other Types of Collections

<https://www.ims.gov/webinars/mitigating-covid-19-when-managing-paper-based-circulating-and-other-types-collections>

- Mitigating COVID-19 When Managing Paper-Based, Circulating, and Other Types of Collections

<https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files//webinar/transcripts/covid-19-webinar-transcript.pdf>

National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCCPT):

- Covid 19 Basics: Re-Entry to Cultural Sites

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

US Department of the Interior:

- Guidance for Completing the Facility Checklist for Spaces Housing DOI Museum Property

https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/doi_museum_facility_checklist_guidance_final_2015.pdf