

Municipal Governance

During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Frequently Asked Questions – April 9, 2021

On April 6, 2021, the Government of Alberta announced a return to Step 1 of the Path Forward. For the most up-to-date information on the COVID-19 situation in Alberta, visit: alberta.ca/COVID19.

While we continue to navigate the ever-evolving COVID-19 pandemic together, Municipal Affairs remains committed to issuing regular updates to address frequently asked questions and provide new information or resources as they become available.

If you would like a specific issue addressed in an upcoming update, please email your request to: ma.lgsmail@gov.ab.ca.

Municipal Affairs Updates

Previous COVID-19 updates are available at: www.alberta.ca/municipal-government-resources.aspx

Council Meetings

Can councils still hold council meetings in-person with members of the public present?

YES. Since municipal council meetings are business meetings and not social meetings, they can be held in person, including with members of the public; however, because of the elevated risk, it is strongly recommended to move to virtual meeting formats wherever possible. It is important to note that masks are mandatory in all indoor public places and indoor workplaces.

Is the Public Meeting Procedures (COVID-19 Suppression) Regulation still in effect?

YES. The Public Meeting Procedures (COVID-19 Suppression) Regulation remains in effect until it has been repealed. The [regulation](#) enables municipalities to follow the Chief Medical Officer of Health's orders for physical/social distancing by conducting meetings electronically. While councils are encouraged to consider electronic meetings to ensure compliance with the public health orders regarding public gatherings, the decision on how to conduct meetings remains at the discretion of the council, committee or commission, while ensuring the process used complies with current public health orders.

Should councillors still be encouraged to wear masks?

YES. Masks are required to be worn indoors at all times, unless individuals are at a workstation and separated from others. If each individual seated in chambers is separated by two metres from all others then masks could be removed; however, it is highly recommended masks remain on for all in-person meetings. At this time, virtual meetings continue to be encouraged wherever possible.

Municipal Advisory Services

If you have further questions, please call: 780-427-2225 (or toll-free by first dialing 310-0000) or email ma.lgsmail@gov.ab.ca

Recreational Facilities

Can municipal facilities such as recreation centres, arenas and aquatic centres remain open?

YES. Municipal facilities used for indoor recreation may remain open only for individual or household one-on-one fitness training and youth group physical activities. At this time, libraries must close.

General Questions

Can municipalities choose to keep certain municipally controlled properties closed even if they are allowed to be open under Step 1?

YES. The decision to open facilities remains a local council decision. Municipalities and the public must continue to put safety first while gradually reopening businesses, resuming activities and getting people back to work.

Are municipalities responsible in any way for use of their community halls or facilities in contravention of the order or parameters of use under the Public Health Order?

YES. Community hall and facility operators are responsible for any contravention to public health orders that occur within their premises. If the operator is the municipality, then the municipality would be held responsible.

Should municipalities be encouraging employees to work from home?

YES. Working from home is mandatory unless the employee's physical presence is required to meet operational needs. While in the office, individuals must practice social distancing and wear masks when in public areas of the office. Municipal staff should be encouraged and supported to have remote work arrangements where feasible.

Are we able to have a small number of staff remain in the office to accept nomination papers, utility payments, etc.?

YES. It is up to each municipality to determine what is operationally required and put in place measures that adhere to the active public health orders to protect the health and safety of the public and employees that are deemed critical to operational effectiveness.

For elections, in addition to delivering nomination forms in person, the specific requirement of section 28 of the *Local Authorities Election Act* to submit nomination forms to the local jurisdiction office can be met by having forms mailed or delivered by courier. Nomination forms can also be accepted at specific times set by the returning officer, by appointment, or at a secure drop-off box.

Ministerial Order No. MSD: 130/20, remains in effect and enables nomination deposits to also be paid by debit or credit card. The need for certain modifications will continue to be monitored and reviewed to ensure municipalities will have the ability to align election operations with public health orders or recommendations.

Additional Resources

RMA's COVID-19 response hub is available at: <https://rmaalberta.com/about/covid-19-response-hub>.

AUMA's updated guide is available at: www.auma.ca/covid19.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities links and resources for municipalities is available at: www.fcm.ca/en/resources/covid-19-resources-municipalities.

For the most up-to-date information on the COVID-19 situation in Alberta, visit: alberta.ca/COVID19