



NOVA SCOTIA COURTS EASING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS, EFFECTIVE JUNE 15

Friday, June 10, 2022

The Nova Scotia Courts are starting to lift COVID-19 restrictions where possible, with the exception of masking in public areas of courthouses. Masks will continue to be mandatory until further notice in public areas, which will enable the Courts to increase capacity in many courtrooms and other common spaces.

The Province of Nova Scotia moved to Phase 3 of its reopening plan on March 21, 2022, eliminating most COVID-19 restrictions in public places. Given the unique position of the Courts, where individuals who attend are often compelled to do so, and where vulnerable segments of the population are often involved, the Courts opted to maintain restrictions and regularly assess the situation after March 21.

Members of the All Courts COVID-19 Recovery Committee met again on May 31 and are now recommending the following changes, effective Wednesday, June 15, 2022:

- **Masking** – Masking will continue to be mandatory until further notice in all public areas of courthouses. Masking inside courtrooms is strongly encouraged but will be at the discretion of the presiding judge. This measure will be reassessed after July 15, 2022.
- **Screening at Courthouses** – Since the beginning of the pandemic, sheriffs have been screening at all courthouse entrances to ensure a visitor's presence at the courthouse was required and that it was safe for them to attend.

At this stage of the pandemic, the Recovery Committee agrees this type of screening is no longer effective or required. That practice will end on June 15, 2022. Sheriffs will continue to hand out disposable medical masks to individuals attending court who may not have one.

- **Capacity Limits** – Given that masking will continue in public areas of courthouses, physical distancing requirements will be lifted and capacity limits in most common areas and courtrooms will return to regular levels, except in Provincial Court.

Provincial Court

The Provincial Court will allow expanded capacity for preliminary inquiries and trials.

However, current COVID-19 restrictions will continue in Provincial Court for intake or arraignment court, or if there is a high volume of matters scheduled in a Provincial Court courtroom.

In those instances, matters will continue to be heard virtually by telephone or video. Counsel and accused individuals should not attend in person unless it is necessary (i.e. entering a guilty plea, sentencing or other contested matters). Defence counsel are encouraged to appear on behalf of their clients, where appropriate, and individuals not directly involved in the proceedings who want to attend in person or participate virtually will still need to make that request in advance to the Court.

Provincial Court judges retain the authority to implement additional protective measures that may be required to protect the health and safety of court users as might be necessary in the circumstances.

These measures will be evaluated regularly and a separate notice will be issued when restrictions in the Provincial Court can be further eased.

The All Courts COVID-19 Recovery Committee will continue to assess the situation to determine when any remaining restrictions can be lifted. For more information, please visit https://www.courts.ns.ca/News_of_Courts/COVID19_Preventative_Measures.htm.

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