

COVID-19 Protocol for Child Custody

Under the Authority of the Chief Medical Officer of Health

1.0 Introduction

Nova Scotia's [Public Health Order](#) is issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health under the authority of the Health Protection Act. Under the Public Health Order, people who enter from outside Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island must [self-isolate for 14 days](#) upon arrival in Nova Scotia unless they have an exemption.

We recognize that travel to carry out child custody agreements must continue with as little interruption as possible during the pandemic. The Public Health Order includes an exemption related to travel for the purpose of carrying out child custody agreements and gives direction to follow this protocol effective March 1, 2021. This protocol aims to balance the need to support parents and children spending time together with the need for self-isolation and testing to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Please follow the directions below for your situation. If there is no scenario below that matches your situation, please contact covid19info@novascotia.ca to determine which requirements apply to you. Please include details about your specific situation.

In addition to the requirements in this protocol, everyone must also follow all the [public health measures](#) in place in Nova Scotia.

2.0 Travel for dropping off/picking up child

Parents are not required to self-isolate in Nova Scotia when they travel for the purpose of dropping off a child with the other parent or picking up a child and the trip is done within 24 hours. The parent must complete the [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#). They will receive a confirmation email which they must show to border officials when they arrive in Nova Scotia, but they will not receive a daily check-in email. Testing is not required.

This applies when a parent:

- travels from outside Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island to drop off/pick up a child in Nova Scotia and then leaves the province within 24 hours
or
- travels somewhere outside Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island to drop off/pick up a child and then returns to Nova Scotia within 24 hours

As an example, the parent might fly outside this region, complete the drop off/pick up with the other parent at the airport, and then fly right back home. As another example, the parent might spend one night in a hotel before returning home.

You do not visit, go shopping, or do other activities in the community where you are dropping off/picking up the child. You only complete the drop off/pickup and return home as quickly as possible within 24 hours.

NOTE: The child must follow the requirements for visiting outlined in Section 3 of this document, including completing the [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#) form or having it completed on their behalf.

NOTE: If the parent stays in Nova Scotia longer than 24 hours, they must self-isolate. For example, a parent might drop off their child for a visit in Nova Scotia and stay in the province during the visit before picking up the child and leaving.

NOTE: If the parent brings another child who is not part of the custody visit and they stay in Nova Scotia longer than 24 hours, both the parent and the child who is not part of the custody visit must self-isolate.

3.0 Travel for visiting a parent or child

Self-isolation is not required for a parent or child who lives in Nova Scotia and receives a visitor as described in this Section 3.1 and 3.2 of this document. As long as they have no symptoms, the Nova Scotia parent or child is free to carry on their regular routines. However, depending on the situation, they may have testing requirements as described in Section 4 of this document.

For the traveling parent or child, there are isolation, testing and other requirements as outlined below.

3.1 Visit involving travel outside Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island (or to/from New Brunswick for one-time or occasional visit)

When travel is for the purpose of visiting (rather than just dropping off or picking up a child), there are isolation, testing and other requirements for the traveling parent or child. These requirements apply to a parent or to a child when they:

- travel to Nova Scotia for a visit from outside Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island (or from New Brunswick for a one-time or occasional visit)
or
- return to Nova Scotia after having traveled for a visit somewhere outside Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island (or in New Brunswick for a one-time or occasional visit)

NOTE: for routine visits requiring travel between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, see Section 3.2 of this document.

To enter Nova Scotia, the parent must complete the [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#). They will receive a confirmation email which they must show to border officials when they arrive in Nova Scotia. Starting on their second day in the province, they will receive daily check-in emails to which they must respond.

The [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#) form must also be completed for a child. If a child under the age of 16 is traveling, one of the parents must complete the form on the child's behalf. Contact information for both parents must be submitted. Both parents will receive the confirmation email. Either the child or the parent traveling with the child must show the confirmation email to officials at the Nova Scotia border. The **parent who lives in Nova Scotia** must respond to the daily emails on the child's behalf.

Once in the province, a modified form of self-isolation in Nova Scotia is required, as outlined below. In addition, the parent or child must get tested for COVID-19 as outlined in Section 4 of this document. They must monitor their health closely and anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 must follow the testing directions in Section 4 of this document.

The parent or child must do a modified form of self-isolation for 14 days. If the parent or child is in Nova Scotia for less than 14 days, they must do the modified self-isolation the entire time they are in the province.

The modified form of self-isolation allows the following interaction with other people:

- A child can interact with people who live in the household they are visiting in Nova Scotia.
- A parent can stay/visit in the same household where their child lives in Nova Scotia and interact with people who live in that household.
- A parent can stay at a different location in Nova Scotia and their child can visit them

there. The child can also go back and forth between their home and the place where the parent is staying.

- A parent or a child can interact with people who live in their own household when they return to Nova Scotia after a visit.
- Maintaining physical distance from household members is not necessary unless a parent or child becomes unwell. Household members do not need to self-isolate unless they become unwell. If anyone is unwell, they must get tested – see Section 4 of this document.

In addition, the parent or child is allowed to do the following during their modified self-isolation:

- Spend time outside on their own property or the property where they are visiting.
- Go for a drive.
- Go for a walk, run, hike, bike or ATV ride for exercise and recreation off their property. If they encounter people from outside their household, they must wear a mask and maintain a distance of 2 metres/6 feet.
- Visit a park, beach or other outdoor public space. If they encounter people from outside their household, they must wear a mask and maintain a distance of 2 metres/6 feet.
- Spend time at their cabin or vacation home (or a rental location) within the province, following the same rules as if at home.
- Drop off and pick up household members at school, work or recreational activities without getting out of the vehicle.
- Use contactless services to pick-up groceries or other items purchased online without getting out of the vehicle.
- Attend a drive-in theatre without getting out of the vehicle.
- Go through a drive-thru, such as at a restaurant or bank, and get self-serve gas.
- Attend necessary (urgent and routine) medical appointments. This includes appointments with physicians and nurse practitioners, dentists, optometrists and other regulated health professionals where in-person treatment is required.

The following activities are not allowed for the parent or child during their modified self-isolation:

- Going to a workplace, school, child care, or extracurricular activities.
- Entering public places (e.g. grocery stores, shopping malls, banks, religious institutions, restaurants/bars).
- Attending indoor and outdoor gatherings.
- Visiting people outside their household.
- Allowing people from outside their household (other than the parent or child they are visiting) to visit them on their property or in their home.
- Volunteering or working in any capacity that requires them to be in contact with people outside their household.

3.2 Parent or child traveling between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick for a routine visit

Recognizing that there are many custody agreements involving frequent travel between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, there are provisions for routine visits between these two provinces. These are visits that take more time than a simple drop off/pickup within 24 hours and happen on a regular, ongoing basis – such as every weekend or every second week.

When it is a one-time or occasional visit, the rules in Section 3.1 of this document apply to Nova Scotia-New Brunswick travel for child custody reasons.

The public health measures outlined below only apply to parents and children who travel for routine child custody visits between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Self-isolation for 14 days upon arrival in Nova Scotia is not required if the following conditions can be met while a parent or child is visiting in New Brunswick or in Nova Scotia:

- Travel as directly as possible to the place where you will be staying, using contactless services for any stops (such as self-serve gas and drive-thrus for food or banking).
- If staying overnight or longer is necessary, the parent and child must isolate in their overnight accommodation.
- Parents and children over the age of 4 must wear a non-medical mask in any indoor public space other than their overnight accommodation.

- Parents have no close contact with anyone except their child(ren).
- Children can continue to attend school, child care or extracurricular activities.
- Monitor your health closely and if you start to feel sick, self-isolate and get tested. If you are in Nova Scotia, see Section 4 of this document for testing information.

To enter Nova Scotia, the parent must complete the [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#) form. They will receive a confirmation email which they must show to border officials when they arrive in Nova Scotia. Starting on their second day in the province, they will receive daily check-in emails to which they must respond.

The [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#) form must also be completed for a child. If a child under the age of 16 is traveling, one of the parents must complete the form on the child's behalf. Contact information for both parents must be submitted. Both parents will receive the confirmation email. Either the child or the parent traveling with the child must show the confirmation email to officials at the Nova Scotia border. The **parent who lives in Nova Scotia** must respond to the daily emails on the child's behalf.

When a parent or child returns to Nova Scotia after the type of visit described above, the parent or child must get tested for COVID-19 as outlined in Section 4 of this document. They can go to work, school or extracurricular activities but for 14 days, they must:

- Minimize close contact with other people.
- Avoid close contact with people at higher risk of developing complications from COVID-19 for 14 days. This includes people with underlying chronic or immunocompromising conditions, seniors, and people living in long-term care facilities or other congregate living settings.
- Avoid non-essential visitors in their home/accommodation.
- Avoid non-essential visits and trips outside their home/accommodation.
- Avoid large gatherings.
- Wear a [non-medical mask in any indoor public space](#) or when they are in close contact (less than 2 metres/6 feet) around other people in a private place outside of their home/accommodation.
- Monitor your health closely. Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 must follow the directions in Section 4 of this document.

3.3 Parent or child traveling between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

At this time, there are no testing or isolation requirements in Nova Scotia for anyone traveling between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Prince Edward Island may have restrictions in place that you must follow if you visit that province.

4.0 Testing

4.1 Mandatory asymptomatic testing

Testing for COVID-19 is mandatory for parents and for children age 4 and older who have traveled outside Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island for visits related to child custody agreements outlined in Section 3.1 and 3.2 of this document.

NOTE: If a child who traveled is under the age of 4 or cannot be tested for any reason, the parent who lives in Nova Scotia must get tested instead.

When you come to Nova Scotia for a visit or when you return to Nova Scotia after a visit, you must book 3 [COVID-19 tests](#). Book the first test on day 1 or 2. If you are still in Nova Scotia, book the second test on day 6, 7 or 8 and the third test on day 12, 13 or 14. If you can't book the tests online, you can contact 811.

This testing is required even if you show no signs of illness. There is no cost for testing.

A negative test result does not give 100% certainty that a person does not have COVID-19. However, testing is an added layer of protection because a negative result is a good indication that the person is not likely carrying and transmitting the virus unknowingly.

4.2 Testing when you have symptoms

Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 must complete the online assessment, book a [COVID-19 test](#), and follow the isolation directions provided. Even if you only have one mild symptom, you need to get tested. If you can't book the test online, you can call 811.

People who have only one mild symptom, other than fever or new or worsening cough, do not have to isolate while waiting for their test and results, unless they are still doing isolation required after travel or they are directed by an exposure notice or Public Health to isolate.

5.0 Custody arrangements with symptoms or diagnosis

5.1 Parent has symptoms or is diagnosed with COVID-19

If the parent can isolate completely apart from the rest of the household and there is another caregiver in the home who can transport the child back and forth between homes, the custody arrangement can continue uninterrupted.

However, if the parent is the only caregiver in the home, then there are two options outlined below. If the parents cannot mutually agree on one option or the other, then Option 1 is the default that they must adhere to.

Option 1: The parents can agree to form a “double bubble” with their two households. The parents can continue to transport the child back and forth as long as both households self-isolate. The isolation ends when the parent with symptoms has received a negative test result or has been told by the Public Health staff managing the parent’s case and any related cases that isolation can end.

Option 2: The parents can agree that the child remains in the household where they were when the parent developed symptoms or received a positive test result. Everyone in the household with the parent who has symptoms or COVID-19 must isolate. The custody agreement would not resume until the parent with symptoms has received a negative test result or has been told by the Public Health staff managing the parent’s case and any related cases that isolation can end.

5.2 Child has symptoms or is diagnosed with COVID-19

There are two options outlined below. If the parents cannot mutually agree on one option or the other, then Option 1 is the default that they must adhere to.

Option 1: The parents can agree to form a “double bubble” with their two households. The parents can continue to transport the child back and forth as long as both households self-isolate. The isolation ends when the child has received a negative test result or has been told by the Public Health staff managing the child’s case and any related cases that isolation can end.

Option 2: The parents can agree that the child remains in the household where they were when they developed symptoms. If the child cannot isolate completely alone, then the parent must also isolate with the child. If there is only one caregiver in the home, then the entire home must isolate.

If there is a second caregiver, then the rest of the household does not have to isolate as long as the parent and child are able to isolate in a separate space and the only shared living space they have with the rest of the household is a bathroom that is cleaned after each use. Cleaning includes high touch surfaces like doorknobs, taps, toilet handle and sink.

The custody agreement would not resume until the child has received a negative test result or has been told by the Public Health staff managing the child's case and any related cases that isolation can end.