



PLASTIC STRAW BY-LAW – APRIL 22, 2020

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Where can I find the plastic straw by-law?

The rules governing plastic straws are in an amendment to License By-law No. 4450. This by-law amendment is available at vancouver.ca/straws

- **By-law 12618 (amends License By-law 4450 regarding plastic straws)**

The consolidated License By-law No. 4450 is available at vancouver.ca/your-government/licence-bylaw

Why ban plastic straws?

The plastic straw by-law is part of a suite of actions the City is taking to reduce single-use item waste as we work towards becoming a zero-waste community by 2040.

In 2018, about 31 million plastic straws were thrown in the garbage in Vancouver. On top of that, an unknown number of plastic straws were littered in the natural environment. Plastic straws were among the top ten most common types of litter found on Canadian shorelines in 2019 according to the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup, and have negative impacts on marine life and the environment when littered.

Prior to the plastic straw by-law, and as a result of the global movement to ban plastic straws, many Vancouver businesses eliminated plastic straws to demonstrate their environmental values.

What types of plastic straws are banned?

With the exception of flexible plastic straws individually wrapped in paper, which must be provided upon request for accessibility, the by-law bans plastic straws that are:

- Made from fossil fuel products,
- Labeled or described as compostable or degradable, or
- Labeled or described as plastic made from plants or other biological materials (example: corn, potatoes, sugarcane)

As we take steps to reduce waste from single-use items during COVID-19, we have worked to ensure all of our by-laws align with the latest public health guidelines and protect the health and safety of residents, businesses and their staff.

For the latest COVID-19 health requirements and resources, please visit:

- The Provincial Health Officer's web page for orders, notices and guidance.
- The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC), including the food business web page.
- Vancouver Coastal Health's environmental health and inspections web page.
- Work Safe BC.



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Why does the ban on plastic straws include plastic labeled or described as compostable, degradable (biodegradable, oxodegradable, photodegradable, etc.), bioplastic, and plastic made from plants or other biological materials, or mixed with plant fibres or other materials?

In addition to plastic straws made from fossil fuel products, the plastic straw by-law also bans the above types of plastic because they:

- Are not accepted in the City's Green Bin program
- Contaminate existing composting and recycling streams
- Are not approved for composting under provincial regulation
- Are not designed to biodegrade if littered in the natural environment

Plastic that is labeled or described as compostable or degradable is also not accepted in Recycle BC's residential recycling collection program.

As contaminants, these types of plastics are most likely to be removed from local composting streams and then disposed to landfill or incinerator.

Does the City of Vancouver approve or certify straws that meet the by-law requirements?

No. It is up to business licence holders and manufacturers to ensure the straws they distribute meet the by-law requirements.

How does Vancouver's plastic straw by-law protect accessibility?

The plastic straw by-law includes an accessibility requirement for businesses, charities and not-for-profits to provide flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper, to people who need them to safely consume beverages and nutrition. Flexible plastic straws must be stored behind a counter to save them for people who need them.

Anyone who asks for a flexible plastic straw should receive one. People are not required, and should not be asked, to provide any medical information to prove their need.

To the best of our knowledge, Vancouver's by-law sets the highest standard for accessibility among plastic straw bans while also working to reduce the majority of plastic straw waste.

Why does Vancouver's plastic straw by-law include an accessibility requirement?

Without the accessibility requirement in the plastic straw by-law, food vendors could choose not to provide flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper, which many people with disabilities rely on to safely consume beverages and nutrition.

The City of Vancouver is developing an Accessibility Strategy to reflect and reinforce the City's commitment to build inclusive communities and provide an accessible environment in which all individuals have access to City services, programs and infrastructure in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. The development of the Accessibility Strategy contributes to the City's "equity lens" to support the health and well-being of all. Using an "equity for all" lens helps ensure that City policy and services are both universal for all residents and accessible for specific populations most vulnerable to *(cont. next page)*



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inequities, including people with disabilities, seniors and people with lived experience of mental health concerns and/or substance use.

Why are flexible plastic straws, made wholly from fossil fuel products and individually wrapped in paper, the most accessible type of straw?

People experiencing age-related physical restrictions, arthritis, auto-immune disease, autism, cerebral palsy, dental and oral conditions, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, neurological disease, spinal cord injuries, stroke recovery and rehabilitation, surgery recovery, and other illnesses and injuries, may rely on flexible plastic straws to safely consume beverages and nutrition.

Flexible plastic straws can be bent at the correct angle to reach the mouth, and then hold their position. This is essential for people who cannot use their hands (or have difficulty using them), or are reclined or lying down. Plastic straws can last as long as people need to consume beverages and liquid meals, which can sometimes take several hours. When individually wrapped in paper, flexible plastic straws are hygienic and protect people with compromised immune systems.

Paper, pasta, metal, glass, acrylic, silicone, and compostable plastic straws are not accessible substitutes because they can cause injury and even death. Paper and pasta straws can be chewed into small pieces and pose a choking hazard. People with motor impairments may clamp down or jar themselves against metal, glass and acrylic straws, causing injury. Pasta and some plastics derived from biological materials like plants may cause allergic reactions. Compostable and degradable plastics may dissolve in warm liquids. Silicone straws and straight plastic straws can be forced to bend but they don't hold their position; doing so restricts the flow of the beverage and not everyone has a care aid to hold up a cup at the correct angle. Table 1 shows how flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper meet the widest range of accessibility needs compared to other types of straws.



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Table 1. Comparing the Accessibility of Different Types of Straws

	Accessibility Criteria								Meets All Criteria
	No Choking Hazard	No Injury Risk	No Food Allergen Risk	No Cleaning Required	Low Cost to Consumer	Safe at High Temperatures	Positionable	Protects Compromised Immune System	
Flexible Plastic,* Individually Wrapped	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Flexible Plastic,* Not Wrapped	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		X
Plastic, Straight	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		If wrapped	X
Plastic Described as Compostable, Degradable or Plastic Made From Plants	✓	✓		✓	✓		If flexible	If wrapped	X
Metal	✓		✓						X
Glass	✓		✓						X
Silicone	✓	✓	✓			✓			X
Acrylic	✓		✓						X
Paper		✓	✓	✓	✓				X
Pasta				✓	✓				X

*Plastic made wholly from fossil fuel products

Chart developed by City of Vancouver based on stakeholder consultation with people with disabilities, City of Vancouver Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee, and https://twitter.com/_sbsmith/status/998632056241307649

Are all food vendors required to provide flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper, for accessibility?

Yes, effective April 22, 2020, all food vendor businesses (e.g. restaurants, cafes, take-out counters, drink shops, concessions, etc.), charities and not-for-profits are required under the by-law to stock flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper, and provide them to patrons upon request.

Is there a list of suppliers that sell flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper?

Yes. A list of suppliers that sell paper-wrapped flexible plastic straws is available at vancouver.ca/straws

How will food vendors know if someone needs a flexible plastic straw for accessibility?

Anyone who asks for a flexible plastic straw should receive one. People are not required, and should not be asked to provide any medical information to prove their need.

Food vendors are encouraged to use the flexible plastic straw menu icon to let customers know that flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper, are available upon request, for accessibility.



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Why does the flexible plastic straw menu icon use the wheelchair symbol?

The menu icon was developed in consultation with the City of Vancouver's **Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee**. The wheelchair symbol is the International Symbol of Access. The flexible plastic straw menu icon uses this symbol for the following reasons:

- The symbol is widely understood by the general public
- The symbol helps to reinforce that flexible plastic straws should be provided to people for accessibility needs
- For non-disabled customers, the symbol reinforces that flexible plastic straws are not for their convenience, but are available for people who need them to safely consume beverages and nutrition

Important note: The menu icon is not intended to imply that flexible plastic straws are only for people in wheelchairs. The City acknowledges that people with visible and invisible disabilities or medical conditions may need flexible plastic straws to safely consume beverages and nutrition.

Do bubble tea vendors have to provide flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper, if requested for accessibility?

Yes. The by-law requires all food vendors to provide flexible plastic straws, individually wrapped in paper, to customers upon request.

Who and what is exempt from the plastic straw by-law?

Hospitals and community care facilities: The plastic straw by-law does not apply to food service to patients in hospitals or residents of community care facilities.

Important: The plastic straw by-law **does** apply to food vendors with a Vancouver business licence whose premises are located in hospitals or community care facilities (example: cafeterias, cafes) that serve prepared food to customers.

Drink boxes and pouches: The by-law does not apply to plastic straws attached to drink boxes and drink pouches.

Selling packages of plastic straws: Retailers are still permitted to sell packages of at least 20 plastic straws for personal use.

One-Year Bubble Tea Straw Exemption: Food vendors who serve bubble tea were provided with a one-year exemption (April 2020 – April 2021) from the ban on plastic straws served with bubble tea. The purpose of the exemption was to allow time for bubble tea businesses to prepare for the plastic straw ban and for the market to offer alternative bubble tea straws that are not made from plastic (including plastic made from fossil fuel products, plastic that is labeled or described as compostable, degradable or bioplastic, and plastic made from plants or other biological materials). As of April 22, 2021, food vendors who serve bubble tea must comply with the ban on plastic straws.



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Why are hospitals and community care facilities exempted from the plastic straw by-law?

The by-law exemption for hospitals and community care facilities gives health organizations flexibility to address health care needs to meet infection control, workplace health and safety and patient care standards. For example, some single-use items are necessary to serve prepared food to hospital patients to reduce the risk of spreading infections, and single-use plastic cutlery is the preferred option in psychiatric units to address safety concerns.

The City is aware that health organizations are investigating opportunities to reduce distribution of single-use items in health care on an ongoing basis.

Why are straws sold for individual/home use still allowed?

The Single-Use Item Reduction Strategy targets items that are commonly littered and does not cover products sold for personal use. People who need a flexible plastic straw to safely consume beverages and nutrition need to be able to buy plastic straws for use at home. Retailers are still permitted to sell packages of at least 20 plastic straws for personal use.

Do charities and not-for-profits have to comply with this by-law?

Yes. All organizations that are required to hold a business licence under the City of Vancouver's License By-law No. 4450 must comply with this by-law, including registered charities and not-for-profit corporations that provide charitable food services.

"Charitable food services" means providing food for free or at low cost by an organization that is incorporated and in good standing under the Societies Act, or registered as a charitable organization under the federal Income Tax Act.

Note: During COVID-19, charitable food services may continue to distribute single-use items with food or meals, including plastic straws, but are expected to begin working towards complying with the by-laws as soon as it is possible for them.

Are food delivery services required to comply with the plastic straw by-law?

If a business only provides delivery services and does not sell prepared food, this by-law does not apply directly to them. However, food vendors that are located in Vancouver must comply with the by-law, including sales through food delivery services. All food delivery service providers should update their online, mobile and telephone ordering platforms to ensure that customers can request flexible plastic straws individually wrapped in paper, if needed for accessibility, from food vendors located in Vancouver.

Here is sample wording food delivery services can use on their ordering platforms for food vendors located in Vancouver:

Flexible plastic straws (for accessibility)

Flexible plastic straws are available for customers who are unable to drink without a straw, or have difficulty drinking, so that they can safely consume beverages and nutrition.

We also recommend including this menu icon on food delivery platforms to show flexible plastic straws are available for accessibility:
Download the icon at vancouver.ca/straws





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What should I do with any leftover stock of plastic straws now that the plastic straw by-law is in effect?

If you have leftover stock of plastic straws since the by-law came into effect, we recommend selling or donating them to businesses in other jurisdictions that do not currently have a ban on plastic straws.

Will there be a grace period during which businesses can use up their remaining stock of plastic straws?

No, there is no grace period for using up banned plastic straws after the by-law takes effect on April 22, 2020.

Can I offer reusable straws to my customers? How should I sanitize these?

We encourage food vendors to offer reusable alternatives, including reusable straws, where possible. Please work with Vancouver Coastal Health to ensure you have systems in place to properly wash and sanitize them.

Important: Reusable straws are not a substitute for flexible straws required for accessibility.

Where can I find information about suggested alternatives to plastic straws?

A list of suggested alternatives is available on our website at vancouver.ca/straws and in our publication, Single-Use Item By-law Guide.

How will the City enforce the by-law?

Due to the extenuating circumstances of COVID-19, City staff are prioritizing outreach and education to ensure businesses have the support they need in order to comply with the single-use item by-laws. If a business is found to be out of compliance with the single-use item by-laws that are in effect, initial City actions will focus on education, outreach and support to help them comply.

Following these initial educational actions to achieve compliance, increasing levels of enforcement may be applied to address non-compliant operators. Enforcement may include issuing tickets, which carry a fine of \$500 per offence, or further prosecutions in provincial court that could be subject to a maximum fine of \$10,000 per offence. Ongoing non-compliance may also result in business licence suspensions, or recommendations for business licence revocation.

For the latest updates on enforcement, visit vancouver.ca/reduce-single-use