

February 3, 2022

MEMORANDUM TO: Municipal Chief Administrative Officers and Clerks

SUBJECT: Steps to Cautiously and Gradually Ease Public Health Measures While Protecting Hospital and Health Care Capacity

Today, I am writing to provide an update on Ontario's response to the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. As a result of public health and workplace safety measures that were put into effect on January 5, 2022, there appear to be signs of stabilization in key public health and health system indicators. I want to express my deep gratitude to municipal practitioners who have worked tirelessly to support their communities throughout the pandemic.

On January 20, 2022, the government announced that province will exit Modified Stage Two and return all public health units to Step Three on January 31, 2022.

In the absence of concerning trends in public health and health system indicators, Ontario will follow a cautious and phased approach to lifting public health measures, with 21 days between each step. Ontario set out its intended approach over the next several weeks.

January 31, 2022

On January 31, 2022, Ontario begins the process of gradually easing restrictions, while maintaining protective measures, including but not limited to:

- Increasing social gathering limits to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors.
- Increasing or maintaining capacity limits at 50 per cent in indoor public settings, including but not limited to:
 - Restaurant, bars and other food and drink establishments without dance facilities;
 - Retailers (including grocery stores and pharmacies)
 - Shopping malls;
 - Non-spectator areas of sports and recreational fitness facilities, including gyms;
 - Cinemas;

- Meeting and event spaces, including conference centres and convention centres;
- Recreational amenities and amusement parks, including water parks;
- Museums, galleries, aquariums, zoos and similar attractions; and
- Casinos, bingo halls and other gaming establishments
- Religious services, rites, or ceremonies.
- Allowing spectator areas of facilities such as sporting events, concert venues and theatres to operate at 50 per cent seated capacity or 500 whichever is less.

Enhanced proof of vaccination, and other requirements would continue to apply in existing settings.

Please see [Ontario Regulation 364/20, Rules for Areas at Step 3 and at the Roadmap Exit Step](#) for the full [list of measures](#).

February 21, 2022

Effective February 21, 2022, Ontario intends to lift public health measures, including:

- Increasing social gathering limits to 25 people indoors and 100 people outdoors.
- Removing capacity limits in indoor public settings where proof of vaccination is required, including but not limited to restaurants, indoor sports and recreational facilities, cinemas, as well as other settings that choose to opt-in to proof of vaccination requirements.
- Permitting spectator capacity at sporting events, concert venues, and theatres at 50 per cent capacity.
- Limiting capacity in most remaining indoor public settings where proof of vaccination is not required to the number of people that can maintain two metres of physical distance.
- Indoor religious services, rites or ceremonies limited to the number that can maintain two metres of physical distance, with no limit if proof of vaccination is required.
- Increasing indoor capacity limits to 25 per cent in the remaining higher-risk settings where proof of vaccination is required, including nightclubs, wedding receptions in meeting or event spaces where there is dancing, as well as bathhouses and sex clubs.

Enhanced proof of vaccination, and other requirements would continue to apply in existing settings.

March 14, 2022

Effective March 14, 2022, Ontario intends to take additional steps to ease public health measures, including:

- Lifting capacity limits in all indoor public settings. Proof of vaccination will be maintained in existing settings in addition to other regular measures.

- Lifting remaining capacity limits on religious services, rites, or ceremonies.
- Increase social gathering limits to 50 people indoors with no limits for outdoor gatherings.

PROOF OF VACCINATION

As announced on December 10, 2021, it is now mandatory to use the enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code to gain access to settings that require proof of vaccination. The QR code can be used digitally or by printing a paper copy. Individuals can download their enhanced certificate with QR code by visiting <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/get-proof>.

In addition, businesses are also now required to verify the certificate using the Verify Ontario app, which is available to download for free from the Apple App and Google Play stores. The app can be used without an internet connection and never stores personal information.

Individuals will continue to need to show a piece of identification that matches their name and date of birth to their enhanced COVID-19 vaccine certificate when visiting select [businesses and organizations](#).

Note that businesses and organizations no longer need to collect information for case and contact management.

There are two exclusions to the use of mandatory enhanced vaccination certificates in Ontario: nine First Nations communities and international visitors to Ontario who do not have a scannable QR code.

Community members of nine First Nations can continue to use their original paper or electronic proof of vaccination along with identification where proof of vaccination is required. They do not need to have an enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code to enter the premises. This exclusion reflects the Province's commitment respecting Indigenous data sovereignty and decisions made by these communities.

These First Nations include:

- Anishinaabeg of Naongashiing
- Big Grassy First Nation
- Lac La Croix First Nation
- Mitaanjigamiing First Nation
- Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation
- Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation
- Rainy River First Nation
- Seine River First Nation
- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

Visitors to Ontario from outside of Canada (OOC) who do not have a QR code that can be successfully scanned by the Verify Ontario app are also excluded. In that case, they

must show businesses their international vaccine receipts and a valid non-Canadian passport or valid NEXUS cards ID for visual verification of their proof of vaccination. This is an interim measure until visitors from OOC can be assigned a temporary traveler's QR code via the Federal government upon their entry to Canada.

To review proof of vaccine for international visitors who may not have a compatible QR code, businesses and organizations should visually confirm:

- That the first name, last name and date of birth of the person on the vaccination documentation matches the non-Canadian passport provided; and
- That their vaccine documentation meets the definition of fully vaccinated and at least 14 days have lapsed since the second dose of vaccine.

The government has updated the [regulation](#), [Guidance for Businesses and Organizations](#) and Questions and Answers to support the implementation of the enhanced vaccine certificate with a QR code and the Verify Ontario app.

BUSINESS SUPPORTS

I also wanted to take this opportunity to share information about new programs that may be helpful to municipal Economic Development staff who are supporting your local businesses during these restrictions. The government has launched the [Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program](#) to support businesses required to close or reduce capacity due to the public health measures put in place to blunt the spread of the Omicron variant. Through the new program, the government will provide eligible businesses with a rebate payment of up to 100 per cent for property tax and energy costs they incur while subject to these restrictions. Applications for the program opened on January 18, 2022. [Learn more about the program and apply here.](#)

The government is also introducing a new COVID-19 [Small Business Relief Grant](#) that will give eligible businesses subject to closure under the modified Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen a \$10,000 grant. The money is expected to flow to eligible businesses in February.

Lastly, the government is also improving [cash flows](#) for eligible Ontario businesses by making up to \$7.5 billion available through a six-month interest- and penalty-free period for Ontario businesses to make payments for most provincially administered taxes. This penalty and interest-free period started on January 1, 2022. This supports businesses now and provides the flexibility they will need for long-term planning.

COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

The ministry recognizes that municipalities have been a key partner in the defence against this virus through the coordinated compliance and enforcement activities your staff have been undertaking in your communities. The Ontario government is continuing to help workplaces stay safe and stay open by carrying out COVID-19 safety campaigns. These campaigns are developed in consultation with local public health

units, and bylaw enforcement departments, and support Ontario's *Plan to Safely Reopen Ontario*.

As you are aware, these campaigns include visits to workplaces that present heightened risk factors for potential transmission of COVID-19. If you are interested in having a provincial team support local compliance and enforcement activities in your community, please contact William (BJ) Alvey, Manager and Executive Advisor of Regulatory Compliance Ontario by email at: William.BJ.Alvey@ontario.ca or by phone at 905-572-7648.

RAPID ANTIGEN TEST KITS

The [Provincial Antigen Screening Program](#) (PASP) provides free rapid antigen test kits to high-risk communities, organizations and workplaces, including municipalities. Please refer to the [Ontario Together portal](#) for information on how to apply for rapid antigen tests, training, on-site rapid testing and reporting requirements.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your flexibility and cooperation throughout this pandemic. Our municipal partners continue to play an essential role in the response to COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Manson-Smith".

Kate Manson-Smith
Deputy Minister