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NEWS RELEASE

Ontario Taking Action to Protect Against Omicron Variant

Vaccines Remain Best Defence Against COVID-19 and Variants

December 10, 2021

[Ministry of Health](#)

TORONTO —The Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is taking action to further encourage vaccination and help limit the spread of COVID-19 and the Omicron variant. These measures will help reduce the risk of transmission during the winter months and further encourage every eligible Ontarian to get their shot so that Ontario's hospital capacity is protected.

"As we continue to learn more about the Omicron variant, we are taking additional measures to protect our progress as we head into the winter months," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "Getting vaccinated and adhering to public health and workplace safety measures will continue to protect us and our loved ones against COVID and variants, but we won't hesitate to continue to take swift action to ensure the continued health and safety of all Ontarians."

Ontario's weekly cases incidence rate is below the national average, and recent investments combined with high vaccination rates have meant hospital and intensive care unit capacity remains stable. In line with Ontario's cautious approach throughout the pandemic and in light of evolving global evidence around the Omicron variant, the province is adjusting its COVID-19 response that will strengthen the province's proof of vaccination requirements and enhance public health measures. This includes the [following measures](#):

- Delaying the [lifting of proof of vaccination requirements](#) beyond January 17, 2022, aligned with the reopening plan that stipulated that doing so was contingent on the absence of concerning trends.
- Effective January 4, 2022, requiring the use of the enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code and the Verify Ontario app in settings where proof of vaccination is required. 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/book-vaccine/>.
- Strengthening the verification process for medical exemptions and clinical trial exemptions by requiring a certificate with a QR code. Organizations and businesses that are under the provincial proof-of-vaccination system will be advised to no longer accept physician notes as of January 10, 2022.
- Effective December 20, 2021, requiring proof of vaccination for youth aged 12 to 17 years participating in organized sports at recreational facilities.
- On the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontarians are strongly advised to limit their social gatherings and the number of gatherings they attend over the holiday season. Additional precautions should be taken if all individuals are not fully vaccinated or where vaccination status is unknown. Employers in all industries should make every effort to allow employees to work from home.

The full suite of measures is outlined in the [backgrounder](#).

To continue providing an additional layer of protection against COVID-19 and variants, as part of its [enhanced winter testing strategy](#) the province is launching a holiday testing blitz next week to offer voluntary rapid antigen screening to asymptomatic individuals free of charge. Two million rapid tests will be provided at pop-up testing sites in high-traffic settings such as malls, retail settings, holiday markets and transit hubs.

In addition, starting on Monday, December 13, 2021 at 8:00 a.m., individuals aged 50 and over will be eligible to schedule their booster dose appointment. This will expand booster eligibility to approximately 5.5 million people. Expanded booster dose eligibility to all Ontarians 18 years of age and older will occur on January 4, 2022, with appointments to be booked approximately six months after receiving a second dose.

“Ontario, like other jurisdictions around the world, is seeing concerning trends in public health and health care indicators, and additional measures are required to protect our progress for the long-term,” said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health. “All Ontarians are strongly urged to follow these and existing measures and get vaccinated with a first, second or booster dose if you have not done so already. These are the layers that

are protecting everyone. By taking these actions, we can help to reduce the mobility of COVID-19 and its variants, protect public health and health system capacity and save lives. This is especially important as we enter the holiday season and spend more time with family and friends. We need to keep each other safe.”

The COVID-19 vaccine remains the single best protection against COVID-19 and variants. Every eligible Ontarian is strongly recommended to get vaccinated or receive their booster if they are eligible as soon as possible.

Quick Facts

- On December 7, 2021, Ontario [extended its pause](#) on the [lifting of capacity limits](#) in remaining higher-risk settings where proof of vaccination is required.
- As of December 13, approximately 5.5 million Ontarians age 50 and over are eligible to receive a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Ontarians are encouraged to [book their appointment](#) as soon as possible.
- Children aged five to 11 are eligible to book their appointment to receive the paediatric COVID-19 vaccine. To get answers to their questions, parents, caregivers and children are encouraged to call the Provincial Vaccine Confidence Line that can be accessed by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900, or visit [COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service](#) to book a confidential phone appointment with a SickKids clinician.
- The [enhanced vaccine certificate with official QR code](#) and the free, made-in Ontario [Verify Ontario app](#) make it easier, more secure and convenient for individuals to provide proof of vaccination where required to do so. As of December 10, 2021, almost 11 million enhanced certificates with QR codes have been downloaded through the [COVID-19 vaccination portal](#) and there have been more than 1.4 million downloads of the Verify Ontario app.
- As of December 9, 2021, Ontario over 90 per cent of Ontarians aged 12 and over having received at least one dose and more than 87 per cent have received a second dose. Over 25 per cent of children aged five to 11 have received their first dose.
- Local medical officers of health continue to have the ability to issue advice, recommendations or instructions under the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 (ROA) as well as Section 22 orders under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, and municipalities may enact by-laws, to target specific transmission risks in the community.

Additional Resources

- [Responding to Omicron and Protecting Our Progress](#)
- [Ontario Extending Pause on Lifting Capacity Limits in Remaining Settings Where Proof of Vaccination is Required](#)
- [Ontario Accelerating Booster Eligibility to Adults Aged 50+](#)
- [Ontario Releases Plan to Safely Reopen Ontario and Manage COVID-19 for the Long-Term](#)
- [Using your Enhanced Vaccine Certificate: Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- For public inquiries, please contact the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY for people who are deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired: 1-866-797-0007).
- For resources in multiple languages to help local communication efforts in responding to COVID-19, visit Ontario's [COVID-19 communication resources webpage](#).
- Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect the people of Ontario from COVID-19.

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