

Q&As

1. What new public health and workplace safety measures is the province implementing? Why?

In response to recent trends that show an rapid increase in COVID-19 hospitalizations, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is temporarily moving the province into Step Two of its Roadmap to Reopen with modifications that take into account the province's successful vaccination efforts. These time-limited measures will help blunt transmission and prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed as the province continues to accelerate its booster dose rollout.

Unlike other variants throughout the pandemic, [evolving data](#) is showing that while the Omicron variant is less severe, its high transmissibility has resulted in a larger number of hospital admissions relative to ICU admissions. Staff absenteeism is also expected to rise and affect operations in workplaces across Ontario due to Omicron infection and exposure, including in hospitals and schools. Real-world experience and evidence in Ontario reveal that approximately one per cent of Omicron cases require hospital care. The rapid rise of Omicron cases, which may soon number in the hundreds of thousands, could result in the province's hospital capacity becoming overwhelmed if further action isn't taken to curb transmission. When one in 100 cases goes to hospital, it means that with this rapid increase in transmission the number of new cases requiring hospitalization will also rapidly increase daily. For example, 50,000 cases per day would mean 500 hospital admissions per day, which is greater than the peak daily hospitalizations of 265 per day from last spring, when hospitals were under significant strain during the third wave of the pandemic.

In response, the province will return to the modified version of Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen effective Wednesday, January 5, 2022 at 12:01 a.m. for at least 21 days (until January 26, 2022), subject to trends in public health and health system indicators.

These measures include:

- Reducing social gathering limits to five people indoors and 10 people outdoors.
- Limiting capacity at organized public events to five people indoors.
- Requiring businesses and organizations to ensure employees work remotely unless the nature of their work requires them to be on-site.
- Limiting capacity at indoor weddings, funerals, and religious services, rites and ceremonies to 50 per cent capacity of the particular room. Outdoor services are limited to the number of people that can maintain 2 metres of physical distance. Social gatherings associated with these services must adhere to the social gathering limits.
- Retail settings, including shopping malls, permitted at 50 per cent capacity. For shopping malls physical distancing will be required in line-ups, loitering will not be permitted and food courts will be required to close.
- Personal care services permitted at 50 per cent capacity and other restrictions. Saunas, steam rooms, and oxygen bars closed.

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- Closing indoor meeting and event spaces with limited exceptions but permitting outdoor spaces to remain open with restrictions.
- Public libraries limited to 50 per cent capacity.
- Closing indoor dining at restaurants, bars and other food or drink establishments. Outdoor dining with restrictions, takeout, drive through and delivery is permitted.
- Restricting the sale of alcohol after 10 p.m. and the consumption of alcohol on-premise in businesses or settings after 11 p.m. with delivery and takeout, grocery/convenience stores and other liquor stores exempted.
- Closing indoor concert venues, theatres, cinemas, rehearsals and recorded performances permitted with restrictions.
- Closing museums, galleries, zoos, science centres, landmarks, historic sites, botanical gardens and similar attractions, amusement parks and waterparks, tour and guide services and fairs, rural exhibitions, and festivals. Outdoor establishments permitted to open with restrictions and with spectator occupancy, where applicable, limited to 50 per cent capacity.
- Closing indoor horse racing tracks, car racing tracks and other similar venues. Outdoor establishments permitted to open with restrictions and with spectator occupancy limited to 50 per cent capacity. Boat tours permitted at 50 per cent capacity.
- Closing indoor sport and recreational fitness facilities including gyms, except for athletes training for the Olympics and Paralympics and select professional and elite amateur sport leagues. Outdoor facilities are permitted to operate but with the number of spectators not to exceed 50 per cent occupancy and other requirements.
- All publicly funded and private schools will move to remote learning starting January 5 until at least January 17, subject to public health trends and operational considerations.
- School buildings would be permitted to open for child care operations, including emergency child care, to provide in-person instruction for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated remotely and for staff who are unable to deliver quality instruction from home.
- During this period of remote learning, free emergency child care will be provided for school-aged children of health care and other eligible frontline workers.

Please view the [regulation](#) for the full list of mandatory public health and workplace safety measures.

In addition, on January 5, 2022 the Chief Medical Officer of Health will reinstate Directive 2 for hospitals and regulated health professionals, instructing hospitals to pause all non-emergent and non-urgent surgeries and procedures in order to preserve critical care and human resource capacity.

2. When will these measures come into effect and how long will they be in effect for?

These measures will come into effect on Wednesday, January 5, 2022 at 12:01 a.m. and be in place for at least 21 days (until January 26, 2022), subject to trends in public health and health system indicators.

3. Why are these measures being introduced now?

As evidence on the Omicron variant evolves, our response needs to evolve along with it.

Unlike other variants throughout the pandemic, [evolving data](#) is showing that while the Omicron variant is less severe, its high transmissibility has resulted in a larger number of hospital admissions relative to ICU admissions. Approximately one per cent of Omicron cases require hospital care. The rapid rise of Omicron cases, which may soon number in the hundreds of thousands, could result in the province's hospital capacity becoming overwhelmed if further action isn't taken to curb transmission. When one in 100 cases goes to hospital, it means that with this rapid increase in transmission the number of new cases requiring hospitalization will also rapidly increase daily. For example, 50,000 cases per day would mean 500 hospital admissions per day, which is greater than the peak daily hospitalizations of 265 per day from last spring, when hospitals were under significant strain during the third wave of the pandemic. Between December 15 and December 30, the province saw a 533 per cent increase in hospitalizations driven by Omicron.

This increase may be blunted with the application of additional public health and workplace safety measures. In response, the government is implementing additional public health and workplace safety measures like those implemented in Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen (modified Step Two).

4. What requirements are there for restaurants to operate an outdoor patio? Does a tent count?

Outdoor service is permitted to continue at restaurants with restrictions in place, including:

- Maximum 10 patrons per table, with limited exceptions (e.g., all members of the same household)
- Dine-in patrons must be seated at all times, with limited exceptions (e.g., using the washroom, paying)
- Open only from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. (take-out, drive-through or delivery permitted at any time)
- Businesses must record the name and contact information of every dine-in patron and actively screen dine-in patrons, with limited exceptions (e.g., quick service restaurants)
- Outdoor dining area must have at least two full sides, or one full side and the roof, open to the outdoors and unobstructed
- No patron dancing or singing
- Liquor sold or served only from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.; no consumption of liquor from 11 p.m. to 9 a.m.
- Maximum capacity must be posted

A setting is considered to be outdoors if an outdoor area of the business or place is:

- Covered by a roof, canopy, tent, awning, or other element if at least two full sides of the area are open to the outdoors and not blocked by any walls or other impermeable physical barriers; or
- Equipped with a retractable roof and the roof is retracted, at least one full side of the outdoor area is open to the outdoors and is not blocked by any walls or other impermeable barriers.

5. What is the protocol for ski hills? Unlimited outdoor capacity and 2 metres distancing being maintained?

Ski hills are permitted to open. There is no capacity limit.

Physical distancing is not required in most outdoor settings; however, there are requirements for physical distancing in line-ups even when outdoors.

Please note that different regulatory provisions may apply under [O. Reg. 263/20](#) (for instance, if a ski chalet has a food or drink establishment on its premise), and it is the responsibility of an individual or business to determine how the regulations apply to their operations.

6. Why is the government reinstating Directive #2?

While the risks for severe illness may be lower with Omicron than with other variants, it is far more transmissible, and hospitalizations are expected to continue to increase, placing greater pressure on our health system. Staff absenteeism is also expected to rise and affect operations in workplaces across Ontario due to Omicron infection and exposure, including in hospitals and schools.

Given increasing hospitalizations and the strain on health human resources, the Chief Medical Officer of Health is reinstating Directive #2 requiring hospitals and health care professionals to temporarily cease non-emergent and non-urgent surgeries and procedures in hospitals and in community settings so resources may be directed to

7. Do sectors that were impacted by the announcement on December 30 fall under these new measures?

Yes. these measures supersede previous announcements. Businesses and organizations should review the regs to ensure they are in compliance with the measures under Step Two of the Roadmap (with modifications).

8. What public health measures need to be followed if an individual is attending a social gathering with vaccinated people, unvaccinated people, or if unknown? Is this mandatory, or just guidance?

Effective Wednesday, January 5, 2022 at 12:01 a.m., the province is reducing capacity limits for indoor social gathering to five people. Outdoor social gathering limits will be reduced to 10 people.

- It is advised that when gathering **indoors** with a **group of fully vaccinated individuals**, you can remove your face covering if everyone is comfortable

It is advised that when gathering **outdoors**:

- with a **group of fully vaccinated individuals**, no face covering or physical distancing is necessary
- with **people from multiple households who are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated or vaccination status is unknown**, you should consider wearing a face covering if physical distancing cannot be maintained

Regardless of where you are, you can wear a face covering and physically distance if you feel it is right for you, especially if you or others are immunocompromised or at high-risk of severe disease or exposure to COVID-19.

In addition, local Medical Officers of Health may issue advice, recommendations or instructions under the *Reopening Ontario Act (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 (ROA)*, or orders under Section 22 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)* to apply public health measures in their jurisdiction to target specific transmission risks in the community. Individuals can check with their local public health unit to see any restrictions that may be in place.

As a reminder:

- COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective and the best way to help protect yourself, your loved ones and your community from the spread of COVID-19. Take the time this holiday season to get your first or second dose of the vaccine if you haven't already, or your booster dose if eligible.
- Wash your hands thoroughly or use hand sanitizer regularly, especially after opening gifts or before preparing, serving and eating food
- Stay home if you are sick, even if your symptoms are mild
- Cover your cough.
- Get tested if [eligible](#).

9. Should employers who have cohort schedules for employees move back to online only? Do they have to?

Given the current pandemic situation, businesses and organizations are required to ensure employees work remotely unless the nature of their work requires them to be on-site.

10. What are the key public health and health system indicators being monitored in order to determine when it is safe to lift these measures?

The government will continue to monitor trends in COVID-19 provincial and local public health and health system indicators, including:

- new hospitalizations;
- New ICU admissions;
- vaccination coverage rates
- surveillance indicators