

Ontario Temporarily Moving to Modified Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen

Time-limited measures needed to preserve hospital capacity as province continues to accelerate booster dose rollout

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[Office of the Premier](#)

TORONTO — In response to recent trends that show an alarming 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. As part of the province's response to the Omicron variant, starting January 5, students will pivot to remote learning with free emergency child care planned for school-aged children of health care and other eligible frontline workers.

"As we continue with our provincial vaccine booster efforts, we must look at every option to slow the spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant," said Premier Doug Ford. "Putting these targeted and time-limited measures in place will give us more opportunity to deliver vaccines to all Ontarians and ensure everyone has maximum protection against this virus."

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.
- 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.

In recognition of the impact the Omicron variant and additional public health measures have on small businesses, the government is expanding the new Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program. Eligible businesses that are required to close or reduce capacity will receive rebate payments for a portion of the property tax and energy costs they incur while subject to these measures. Eligible businesses required to reduce capacity to 50 per cent, such as smaller retail stores, will receive a rebate payment equivalent to 50 per cent of their costs, while businesses required to close for indoor activities, such as restaurants and gyms, will receive a rebate payment equivalent to 100 per cent of their costs. A full list of eligible business types will be made available when applications for the program open later this month. To improve cash flows for Ontario businesses, effective January 1, 2022, the government is also providing up to \$7.5 billion for a six-month interest- and penalty-free period for Ontario businesses to make payments for most provincially administered taxes, supporting businesses now and providing the flexibility they will need for long-term planning.

The government is also exploring options for providing further targeted and necessary supports for businesses and workers impacted by the province's move into a modified Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen, including grants. The government will also continue to call on the federal government to come to table and help us support Ontario businesses and Ontario workers by allowing eligible businesses to defer HST and to enhance supports available to workers affected by current public health measures.

"As cases continue to rise at a rapid rate and evidence on the Omicron variant evolves, additional time-limited measures are needed to help limit transmission as Team Ontario continues to get booster doses into arms," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "While this was not an easy decision, these measures will help preserve hospital bed capacity and prevent our hospitals from becoming overwhelmed."

"Children will continue to receive live virtual learning during this period, led by their teacher, with full access to school-based academic and mental health supports," said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. "We will continue to work closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to keep our communities safe and ensure that Ontario students get back to in-person learning as soon as possible."

As of January 2, more than 3.7 million booster doses have been administered across the province. The government is focusing all efforts to speed up booster doses, including employer-led vaccination clinics and expanded GO-VAXX mobile clinics. To date, over 4,300 Ontarians have registered through the [Ontario COVID-19 Volunteer Portal](#) and [the Health](#)

[Workforce Matching Portal](#) and have answered the province's call to arms to businesses, volunteers and retired health professionals to help further boost capacity to administer vaccines and get more boosters into arms sooner.

The province is also continuing to urge the federal government to approve COVID-19 antivirals to support Canada's pandemic response.

"While the risks for severe illness are lower with Omicron than with the previous variants of concern, it is far more transmissible and hospitalizations are expected to continue to increase placing greater pressure on our health system," said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health. "It is difficult but necessary to apply additional public health and workplace safety measures to help stop the spread of the virus and protect our health system capacity. Please follow all public measures and get vaccinated with your first, second or booster dose if you have not done already."

Quick Facts

- As of January 2, 2022, more than 27 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered, with more than 90 per cent of Ontarians aged 12 and over having received at least one dose and more than 88 per cent having received at least a second dose. More than 43 per cent of children aged five to 11 have received their first dose and over 3.7 million booster doses have been administered including to 47 per cent of individuals aged 50 and over and more than 31 per cent of individuals aged 18 and over.
- In consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario updated its [COVID-19 testing and isolation guidelines](#) on December 30, 2021. These updates follow recent changes in other jurisdictions in Canada and the United Kingdom to ensure publicly funded testing and case and contact management resources are available for the highest-risk settings and to protect the most vulnerable and help keep critical services running.
- The Ontario government is amending O. Reg. 263/20 (Rules for Areas at Step 2) under the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 (ROA) to apply additional or modify public health and workplace safety measures, and amending O. Reg. 363/20 (Steps of Reopening) to move Ontario to the amended Step Two, effective Wednesday, January 5th.

Additional Resources

- [Ontario Updating Public Health Measures and Guidance in Response to Omicron](#)
- [Updated Eligibility for PCR Testing and Case and Contact Management Guidance in Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Further Strengthening Response to Omicron](#)
- [All Ontarians 18+ Eligible for COVID-19 Booster Appointments at Three-Month Interval](#)
- Anyone who meets provincial testing eligibility criteria can go to an assessment centre, participating pharmacy, or specimen collection centre for testing. Visit [Ontario.ca/covidtestinglocations](#) to find a testing location and for eligibility criteria to be tested.
- 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.
- Business who have questions about public health and workplace safety measures can call the Stop the Spread Business Information Line at 1-888-444-3659.
- For public inquiries call ServiceOntario, INFOline at 1-866-532-3161 (Toll-free in Ontario only)

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