

# COVID-19 Update

For more information:  
[Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus)

Information for Indigenous communities:  
[Canada.ca/coronavirus-info-indigenous](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus-info-indigenous)



## INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA – Ontario Region – January 10, 2022

An Omicron-driven wave of COVID-19 has led to a sharp spike in COVID-19 cases over the last two weeks, putting pressure on every community across the province. It is of utmost importance that community members take steps to protect each other. This means limiting contacts to those in the same household; wearing a well-fitting mask; washing or sanitizing hands frequently; maintaining a physical distance of 2 metres from those with whom you do not live; and getting fully vaccinated, including a booster shot if you are eligible. Widespread vaccination and other public health measures will help us achieve the best public health outcomes by reducing overall transmission.

We want to reiterate how important it is that individuals testing positive for COVID-19 tell their close contacts about their infection. There is no shame in catching COVID-19. This virus – and particularly Omicron – is very transmissible and case numbers are at an all-time high. Even individuals who take the strictest precautions can still become infected. Telling those around you that you have tested positive is a sign of respect and care for others in your community. We can only get through this by working together.

Omicron is dominating public discussion around COVID-19 as its transmissibility has changed many things. Evidence on Omicron's severity is still evolving but signs are pointing to it being less severe. However, the sheer number of people becoming infected threatens our health system and the smooth operation of other essential services. We all share a responsibility to get vaccinated and encourage others to get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and the most vulnerable members of our communities from falling ill from COVID-19.

*Michael O'Byrne, Acting Regional Executive and Anne Scotton, Regional Director General*

### COVID-19 response funding is still available

As Omicron continues to spread across Ontario, we encourage all communities to take precautionary steps to prepare for the possibility that COVID-19 cases continue to rise in the coming weeks. It is highly recommended that you review your community's emergency plans and identify any additional support that you may require.

The needs-based portion of the Indigenous Community Support Fund (ICSF) and the Public Health Measures Fund remain available to support Indigenous communities and organizations, both on- and off-reserve, to prepare, prevent and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Needs-based funding requests will continue to be accepted and evaluated until all available funding has been fully exhausted. Each request is assessed for eligibility and prioritized on a case-by-case needs-basis, according to the following criteria: COVID-19 risk; readiness; human impact; and prior funding. Examples of activities that may be funded under these programs include:

- Cultural, children and family, and senior supports
- Isolation space
- Community-based workers
- Measures to address food insecurity
- Personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies
- Mental health and emergency response activities
- Supports to update, review or activate pandemic plans
- Perimeter security

[Click here](#) for more information and to learn about the application process.

### Ontario returns to Stage Two restrictions

On January 5, 2022, the Province on Ontario moved back into Stage Two of the [Roadmap to Reopen](#) guidelines in response to the growing number of COVID-19 cases. Some of the new restrictions now in effect include:

- Students attending provincial schools will attend class through remote learning.
- Reduced social gathering limits to 5 people indoors and 10 people outdoors.
- Reduced capacity limits for weddings, funerals, and religious services, rites, and ceremonies.
- Reduced retail capacity to 50% for non-essential stores.
- Closing indoor dining.

These restrictions will remain in place until at least January 26, 2022. For the full list of restrictions, please visit [this Ontario webpage](#).

### Resource: COVID-19 vaccines for children and youth

The Ontario Ministry of Health has created a new resource with common questions and answers about COVID-19 vaccines for children aged 5-11 and youth aged 12-17. It can be found in multiple languages by following these links:

- [English](#)
- [French](#)
- [Algonquin](#)
- [Mohawk](#)
- [Michif](#)
- [Ojibway](#)
- [Oji-Cree](#)
- [Swampy Cree](#)
- [Inuktitut](#)



### Updates to isolation and PCR testing

Throughout the pandemic, guidance has often changed to reflect the current situation presented by COVID-19. The emergence of Omicron means re-adjusting once again and adopting new approaches to limit the spread of the virus.

On December 31, 2021, the Province of Ontario announced new rules around COVID-19 testing. Currently, First Nations community members and individuals travelling into First Nations to work *are eligible* for PCR tests. However, if an individual has symptoms of COVID-19, they do not need a test to begin isolation. Testing labs are overwhelmed with a backlog of tests to process, so PCR results may come too late to provide any value. The safest thing to do in these situations is to assume that the test would be positive and begin isolation.

Unfortunately, it is very likely that Omicron will reach your community, if it has not already. It is critically important that your community take steps to slow transmission of this highly contagious variant to protect vulnerable community members and to maintain essential services. If everyone is sick, there will not be enough community members to perform tasks like delivering food.

In accordance with [new provincial guidance](#), anyone who has at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and has symptoms of COVID or tests positive through a rapid or PCR test – even if the individual does not have any symptoms - is required to isolate for 5 days from the onset of symptoms or the positive test, whichever came first.

Individuals who have symptoms of COVID or test positive and who are partially vaccinated or unvaccinated – even if they do not have symptoms - must isolate for 10 days from the onset of symptoms or the positive test, whichever came first. [Please read ISC Ontario Region's new Public Health Alert](#) for more guidance.

Communities should consider their local circumstances. In many communities, asking fully vaccinated individuals to isolate for longer than the required 5 days may offer more certainty that they will not transmit the disease to others when they end isolation, but it could disrupt essential services, depending on the individual's role in the community. As community situations may vary, this information is meant to supplement, not replace, the advice of local public health authorities.

In communities with low vaccination rates, many people will need to isolate for 10 days, meaning the whole community may need to take a more conservative approach to protect each other and prepare more for the likely disruption to essential services. These are difficult choices and there is no perfect answer in the face of Omicron. Community members need to work together to do everything possible to limit transmission so that you can maintain essential services and protect your most vulnerable from becoming seriously ill or hospitalized. Above all else, this means staying home.

### COVID-19 Cases

\*As of January 7, 2022 at 12:00 p.m.

- **4,695** confirmed cases on reserve
- **768** active cases
- **39** deaths
- **3,888** resolved (82.8%)

### Booster shots significantly improve protection against Omicron

Over time, the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine can decrease. This is not a new phenomenon. Booster shots are commonly given for many vaccines that we routinely receive throughout our lives. They help to renew our protection against a disease.

We now know that while a full series of two vaccines offers some protection against Omicron, getting a booster is critical to protecting oneself from infection. That is why receiving a booster dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine is so important as soon as you are eligible. The booster shot is designed to help people maintain their protection against COVID-19 over time. An individual who received their second dose four months ago is about 30-40% protected against infection from Omicron – a significant drop in protection compared to other variants. Two weeks after getting a booster shot, an individual's protection against infection from Omicron nearly doubles to almost 80%. Booster doses are even more effective at preventing severe illness and hospitalization.

Widespread vaccination is one of the most effective ways to protect our elders, families, communities, and ourselves against COVID-19. Getting a booster dose will help to slow transmission and limit disruption to essential services. Evidence shows that being fully vaccinated provides strong protection against serious illness and hospitalization. Although fully vaccinated individuals can still transmit COVID-19, this is less likely to occur than for unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals.

In Ontario, all people over the age of 18 and for whom it has been at least 84 days (3 months) since they received their second dose are eligible for a booster dose.

Please feel free to contact the FNIHB Ontario COVID-19 generic inbox: [sac.covid-19fnihbontario.isc@canada.ca](mailto:sac.covid-19fnihbontario.isc@canada.ca) if you or your community members have any information needs.

### Update on Operation Remote Immunity 3.0

Phase two of Operation Remote Immunity 3.0 is scheduled to begin on January 10, 2022 in communities in the Sioux Lookout Zone and on January 24, 2022 in communities served by the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority. Given the fluid circumstances caused by the Omicron variant, the exact schedule may need to be adjusted. ORI 3.0 will offer first, second, and third doses to anyone who is eligible, including to children who are 5-11 years old. Beginning on January 24, second doses will be available for children in this age group in the Sioux Lookout Zone. The ORI team is committed to ensuring that everyone who wants to receive a vaccine has the opportunity to do so.

#### Rapid antigen tests

Rapid antigen tests have been the subject of much discussion in recent weeks. Indigenous Services Canada is working in partnership with the province to ensure that everyone who needs rapid antigen tests will have access to them as an additional tool to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Recognizing that there may be occasional supply issues, maintaining essential services to keep the communities operational, and protecting communities' most vulnerable, will be prioritized.

Rapid tests are an important tool that provide an extra layer of defense against the spread of the virus. Rapid tests are extremely reliable when they return a positive result. During this time, when Omicron is travelling quickly through the population, a positive rapid test indicates COVID-19 infection. If an individual tests positive on a rapid test, they should isolate in accordance with the guidance as described in the [latest Public Health Alert](#).

However, a negative result on a rapid test *does not* mean that it is safe to undertake riskier social activities, like gathering indoors with people from outside one's household. In this setting, rapid tests do not always accurately detect COVID-19 in the early stages of infection and in these situations, a negative test can result in missed case.

If a systematic, repeat rapid testing program is used to keep essential workers delivering services, rapid tests *can* be relied upon when tests are being routinely taken, by people who are administering them correctly – for example, health care workers who take a test daily.

[Check out this video](#) from the manufacturer of one of the common rapid tests available in Ontario, Rapid Response, to learn how to properly use their rapid test. Note that other manufacturers may have different processes for their tests. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Vaccination against COVID-19, including the Omicron variant, together with other public health measures remains the best layer of defense against COVID-19.

#### Guidance on mask-wearing

Mask-wearing remains a very effective way to limit the spread of COVID-19. The best way to limit the spread of COVID-19 is staying home and getting vaccinated. The importance of vaccination to control the spread of Omicron cannot be overstated. However, if an individual needs to leave their home – and especially if they will be indoors with other people – wearing a well-fitting, three-layer medical mask is best.

While not all masks are equal when it comes to how well they filter out particles like COVID-19, the fit of a mask is a key factor in how well it will protect the wearer and reduce overall transmission of the virus. [This guide](#) has helpful tips to ensure that a mask fits its wearer well.

If an individual does not have access to a three-layer mask, they should wear the best mask they have available to them and ensure that it properly fits their face. [This radio script from SLFNHA](#) has great ideas on how to improve cloth masks and properly handle masks. Consider airing it on your local station or sharing it in a community Facebook group or other forum. Most importantly, please encourage your community members to continue to wear masks.

N95 or KN95 masks should be prioritized for vulnerable people and those with high likelihood of exposure, like health care workers and other front-line staff.

#### COVID-19 Vaccines for Ontario

\*All data reflects totals from 8 p.m. on January 9, 2022

- **93,741** Daily doses administered
- **28,551,554** Total doses administered
- **11,474,711** People fully vaccinated