



Important Public Health Alert #3: Omicron + new guidelines

To: Chiefs, Health Directors, Pandemic Leads

Date: January 7, 2022

The COVID-19 situation is continuing to change very quickly in Ontario. Omicron, the dominant Variant of Concern, is more easily spread than previous variants making it more difficult to control and contain the spread. Case numbers are expected to increase further. While early evidence suggests Omicron may cause less severe disease than previous variants, some individuals will still become very sick from Omicron, especially if they are not vaccinated. Omicron requires a different public health approach throughout Ontario, including First Nation communities.

Testing

Because Omicron is so easily spread, many jurisdictions have had to adjust their testing strategies and Ontario is no different. On December 31, 2021, Ontario prioritized publicly-funded PCR testing for high-risk groups and settings only. Individuals from First Nation communities will continue to have access to PCR testing. Positive rapid antigen tests and rapid molecular tests such as the GeneXpert and the ID Now no longer require PCR testing to confirm COVID-19 infection.

Isolation of cases and household contacts

We ask all individuals who have symptoms - even if they are mild - or think they may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 to please isolate immediately. This is one of the best things you can do to limit the spread in your community and protect your loved ones.

Individuals with COVID-19 who are fully vaccinated (at least 2 doses) and not immunocompromised, as well as children under 12 years of age, will be required to self-isolate for **at least 5 days** after the day their symptoms began. Individuals can come out of isolation after symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms). The 5 day isolation period does not apply to those who work in the highest risk settings.

All household members (regardless of their vaccination status) will need to self-isolate while the case is isolating.

There may be circumstances when isolation periods will be longer to best protect the community.

Exposure to a case who does not live in your household

If you are **fully vaccinated** (at least 2 doses) and have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19, do not have symptoms yourself, and do not live with the case, then please **self-monitor** for symptoms for 10 days since you last were with the case and follow all public health measures.



If you are **not vaccinated, partially vaccinated**, or immuno-compromised, you will be required to **isolate** for 10 days.

Stricter isolation guidance continues to be appropriate if you work in a highest risk setting.

Case and contact management

Because of rapidly rising case numbers, the province has shifted their approach to case and contact management. This means that positive cases in settings such as long-term care, retirement homes, and First Nations communities will continue to have case and contact management.

In First Nations communities, **full case and contact management will be conducted as long as capacity allows**. It is very likely that many communities will reach a point where the demand overwhelms the capacity to keep up with case and contact management. When this happens, Indigenous Services Canada may adopt an approach similar to the province. In this situation ISC may recommend a **prioritized approach for highest-risk** settings (e.g. elder care lodges where the risk of spread is greater) and vulnerable populations (e.g. those who are at risk of more severe disease). **Cases may be asked to notify their own close contacts**.

Vaccination

Vaccination remains the most important way to protect yourself, your family and your community. We continue to encourage all those eligible for first, second, third or fourth doses to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Summary

ISC remains committed to continuing to support First Nation communities in their response to COVID-19. We cannot prevent all Omicron infections but we can limit and slow the spread in community to mitigate the risk of overwhelming the health care system. We need to take immediate action to: improve vaccination coverage; limit all non-essential travel; stay home or isolate when you have symptoms.

This advice is intended to supplement, not replace, the advice of local public health authorities.

Respectfully,

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