

Important Changes to the Rules for Isolation After COVID-19

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What's new?

Last week, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore said that people who feel sick should self-isolate while they are experiencing symptoms, but they are able to return to work or school only 24 hours after their symptoms have ended.*

Instead of self-isolating, he recommends that people wear a mask for about 10 days after the day they start having symptoms.* He was asked if it's okay to go out in public if you test positive on a rapid test or PCR test but don't have symptoms anymore. He said yes, with "additional precautions."*

"The caveat is that we also want to maintain high levels of protection through ongoing, keeping up to date with all of our vaccinations, but in particular keeping up to date with the COVID-19 vaccination," he said.*

Here are other guidelines that Dr. Moore outlined for the general public:

- If you have a fever, stay home until it's completely gone.
- If you have gastrointestinal symptoms, stay home until symptoms have improved for at least 48 hours.
- If you're in the same household as someone who is sick or tested positive for COVID-19, wear a mask in public spaces.
- Even if you feel better, and avoid vulnerable individuals and settings for 10 days after exposure. Isolate immediately if you develop symptoms.

What were the old rules?

It used to be mandatory for fully vaccinated people who tested positive for COVID-19 to self-isolate for five days. The isolation period was at least 10 days for people 12 years old and up and not fully vaccinated, people who are immunocompromised, and residents of highest-risk settings.*

The last time Ontario's isolation guidelines were changed was the end of December 2021.* Dr. Moore shortened the required isolation period from 10 days to five for people who are vaccinated.* This new policy applies to both the vaccinated and unvaccinated.*

Why did the rules change?

Dr. Moore said that these changes are happening because more people are vaccinated.* As a result, the province is moving to a new approach: an “all-virus approach.”* This plan is meant to respond to other respiratory viruses as well as COVID-19.*

Those who are ill are being asked not to visit settings that are at higher risk, such as hospitals and Long-Term Care homes.* However, schools are not included on that list.* In fact, this is the first school year since 2019 where schools do not have any mandatory COVID-19 restrictions.*

Dr. Moore says that this is the case because more school-age children are vaccinated and schools have better ventilation and cleaning.*

“Too Soon” says Ontario’s former COVID-19 Science Table and Other Health Experts

One week before this announcement was made, Public Health Ontario told Ontario’s COVID-19 Science Table that it would be dissolved on September 6.* This group of health experts, mostly made up of volunteers, gave advice to the government throughout the pandemic.*

When the announcement was made last week, multiple members of this group spoke out against these changes.

Dr. Fahad Razak, the scientific director for the province’s science table said the group did not officially assess this decision and that he is against it, preferring people to wear masks indoors regardless of their symptoms.*

“Millions of kids across the country will be now coming into these indoor settings and that is a setting where viral spread will become easier to occur,” he said.*

Other members of the science table, Dr. Douglas Manuel and Dr. Gerald Evans , also expressed that they think it is too soon.

Dr. Manuel states, “We’re not really in a good position. We’re going to have waves where a lot of people get sick quite quickly, so absenteeism and being able to maintain staffing in hospitals and schools and airports and other essential services.”* To learn more about staff shortages of healthcare workers, click [here](#) to read last week’s article.

Dr. Evans said that the United States has seen a “tremendous rise” in COVID-19 cases since their schools have already opened.* “The problem that I have with lifting the isolation rule is that knowing this is likely to happen here,” he explained.*

He also disagrees with the province’s new “all-virus approach.”* “It’s way too early for this sort of approach to COVID with the flu season coming up and it underscores a generalization that all respiratory viruses are kind of the same and that’s just not true,” he said.*

Dr. Razak noted: “I’m seeing significant risk in the health-care system and a wave that has not receded to the extent that we would like.”* In other words, the number of cases has not gone down enough for this to be a sensible move and not a threat to the healthcare system.

Public Health Ontario is going to create a new group of 15 health experts.* This group will be independent from Public Health Ontario, but there will be limits on what its members can investigate.*

Final Thoughts

This news can spark a lot of feelings, like frustration, fear, stress, sadness, anger, helplessness, despair, and more. If you need mental health support, check out our previous articles for ideas. Click [here](#) to read “Ways to Cope with Uncertainty” and click [here](#) to read “Three Things to Do When It Feels Like COVID-19 Will Never End.”

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675