

NEWS RELEASE

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Public Health Officials across Northern Ontario increase COVID-19 protection for all users of indoor sporting facilities

NORTHERN ONTARIO, ON – Northern Ontario Medical Officers of Health continue to put the health and safety of residents first. Effective October 14, operators of facilities in Northern Ontario where indoor sports are played or practiced will ensure additional groups provide proof of vaccination against COVID-19. Northern Ontario's seven Medical Officers of Health have issued instructions to facility operators under the Reopening Ontario Act requiring anyone aged 12 and older coaching, officiating, or volunteering at indoor organized sports to provide proof of vaccination unless a medical exemption applies.

Activities related to organized sports have the potential to increase COVID-19 transmission. Specifically, close contact, heavy breathing, long exposure times, crowded indoor spaces, and masks removed during physical activity, all contribute to increased risk of COVID-19 transmission. Requiring more groups to be protected with COVID-19 vaccinations will help reduce this risk while maintaining opportunities for sport.

Currently, the Province of Ontario requires proof of vaccination for all those 12 and older entering indoor sport and recreational fitness facilities but exempts those under 18 who enter only to participate in an organized sport. As per the provincial guidance, the requirements do not apply to workers or volunteers, including coaches and officials.

Under the letters sent today, northern Medical Officers of Health are instructing facility operators to require those aged 12 and older who coach, officiate, or volunteer at indoor organized sports to show proof of vaccination.

Northern Ontario Medical Officers of Health advise that we are currently in the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the highly transmissible Delta variant the dominant strain causing COVID-19 cases. The benefits of physical activity and socializing are critical to residents' well-being. Requiring proof of vaccination for those who support organized sport will help to keep sports running and protect all those participating.

Many local organized sports groups and teams participate in travel across Northern Ontario. As all seven Northern Ontario public health units are implementing the same requirement, there will be a consistent approach to vaccine requirements to help reduce the risk of spread and keep communities safe.

Proof of vaccination is not currently required for those aged 12 to 17 who actively participate in organized sports. However, the Northern Ontario Medical Officers of Health will continue to monitor the local COVID-19

situation and adjust instructions as needed. Everyone aged 12 and over is strongly encouraged to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible. Municipalities, businesses, and organizations across the region are strongly recommended to develop and implement COVID-19 vaccination policies.

For more information or if you have questions, please call your local public health unit or visit their website.

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Medical Officers of Health from Northern Ontario

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