

Health officials support proof of vaccination

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Ontario residents will have to show proof of vaccination if they want to enter certain facilities. As of Sept. 22, Ontarians will have to provide proof to enter sports venues, bars, restaurants and other indoor facilities. The provincial government made the move to confront the Delta-driven fourth wave of COVID-19. It's a very responsive, data-driven move, according to Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health. Requiring proof of vaccination in these settings reduces risk and is an important step to encourage every last eligible Ontarian to get their shot, which is critical to protecting the province's hospital capacity, while also supporting businesses with the tools they need to keep customers safe, stay open and minimize disruptions. "As the world continues its fight against the Delta variant, our government will never waver in our commitment to do what's necessary to keep people safe, protect our hospitals and minimize disruptions to businesses," said Premier Ford. "Based on the latest evidence and best advice, COVID-19 vaccine certificates give us the best chance to slow the spread of this virus while helping us to avoid further lockdowns. If you haven't received your first or second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, please do so today." As of September 22, 2021, Ontarians will need to be fully vaccinated (two doses plus 14 days) and provide their proof of vaccination along with photo ID to access certain public settings and facilities. This approach focuses on higher-risk indoor public settings where face coverings cannot always be worn and includes:

Restaurants and bars (excluding outdoor patios, as well as delivery and takeout). Nightclubs (including outdoor areas of the establishment). Meeting and event spaces, such as banquet halls and conference/convention centres. Facilities used for sports and fitness activities and personal fitness training, such as gyms, fitness and recreational facilities with the exception of youth recreational sport. Sporting events, including horse racing. Casinos, bingo halls and gaming establishments. Concerts, music festivals, theatres and cinemas; These mandatory requirements would not apply to outdoor settings where the risk of transmission is lower, including patios, with the exception of outdoor nightclub spaces given the risk associated with the setting. In addition, these requirements will not apply to settings where people receive medical care, food from grocery stores, medical supplies and the like. Aligned with public health measures currently in place, indoor masking policies will continue to remain in place. Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, welcomes the proof of vaccination. York Region Public Health had provided evidence to the Chief Medical Officer of Health to have vaccine requirements for select higher-risk indoor public settings to help dampen the rise in cases in this fourth wave. "We had urged the province to consider a standardized provincial approach to vaccine certificates and mandates; having different apps and rules from every health unit would not have been a viable option," he said. The greatest increases in cases are in unvaccinated individuals: the rate in unvaccinated individuals is 176 cases per 100,000 and rising, compared to vaccinated individuals at a stable 12 cases per 100,000; these individuals have a high likelihood of ending up in hospital and in ICUs; across Ontario about 40% of those who go into the ICU end up dying. We expect these measures to help dampen the rise in cases and reduce hospitalizations in our burdened health care system. We are committed to working in partnership with the business community, government officials and Medical Officers of Health to ensure a smooth rollout. We look forward to seeing proof of vaccination status to access certain businesses and settings starting September 22, and the enhanced digital vaccine receipt effective October 22, 2021. Vaccine certificates are both for security and safety of the unvaccinated and vaccinated individuals given the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant. We continue to urge those that are not vaccinated to seek out opportunities to get vaccinated; information on clinics is available at york.ca/covid19vaccine. We know vaccines provide the best protection against COVID-19 and the Delta variant," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "To protect the health and well-being of Ontarians, our government will offer one more tool to encourage even more Ontarians to receive the vaccine and provide further protection to fully vaccinated Ontarians as they safely enjoy activities with their loved ones and support their local businesses. Individuals who cannot receive the vaccine due to medical exemptions will be permitted entry with a doctor's note until recognized medical exemptions can be integrated as part of a digital vaccine certificate. Children who are 11 years of age and younger and unable to be vaccinated will also be exempted from these requirements. For the period between Sept. 22 and Oct. 12, it is intended that people attending wedding or funeral receptions at meeting or event spaces will be able to provide a negative rapid antigen COVID-19 test from no more than 48 hours before the event as an alternative to proof of vaccination. These rapid antigen

tests would have to be privately purchased. Ontario will develop and provide additional tools to improve user experience, efficiency and business supports in the coming weeks, including establishing alternative tools for people with no email, health card or ID. The government will work to support implementation of vaccine certificates for Indigenous communities whether or not they have opted to enter their data into COVaxON, while maintaining Indigenous data governance, control, access and possession principles. Ontarians currently have access to a paper or PDF vaccine receipt that includes all relevant information to prove that they are fully vaccinated. As of Sept. 22, Ontarians will be required to show their vaccine receipt when entering designated settings along with another piece of photo identification, such as a driver's licence or health card. This is similar initial implementation approach announced in British Columbia. Ontario will also introduce an enhanced digital vaccine receipt that features a QR code, which is safe, more secure and with you wherever you go. This digital vaccine receipt can be kept on a phone and easily used to show that you've been vaccinated if you need to. In addition, the province will launch a new app to make it easier and more convenient for businesses and organizations to read and verify that a digital vaccine receipt is valid, while protecting your privacy. As the 2021-22 school year begins, it is critical to keep Ontario schools safe and students learning in-person. The province will work with trusted public health units to use the existing COVaxON system to safely and securely confirm the vaccination status of students. The province is committed to keeping parents informed about how their child's COVID-19 vaccine information and enrollment data is being used to keep schools safe. This will equip local public health units with the information they need to ensure rapid case and contact management if required to limit disruptions in the event of cases or outbreaks and keep kids in class. "We are already seeing a rise in the number of cases of COVID-19 as we head into the fall," said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health. "As we enter the last mile push to increase vaccination rates, the introduction of a vaccine certificate is an important step to give people the tools to limit further spread of the virus so that we can ensure the safety of all Ontarians while keeping the province open and operational." "Combining the use of a QR code with a trusted, made in Ontario verifier app will help support the province's health measures," said Kaleed Rasheed, Associate Minister of Digital Government. "These tools will provide a simpler, faster, and better way to prove vaccination status that is both convenient and secure" while also supporting businesses with an easy validation process. "Individuals can provide proof of immunization by downloading or printing their vaccine receipt from the provincial booking portal, or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Booking Line at 1-833-943-3900. Ontarians who received their first or second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine out of province should contact their local public health unit to record their information and receive proper documentation.