



Frequently Asked Questions

Letter of Instruction – Outdoor Recreation Amenities

Updated: December 29, 2021

Ottawa Public Health Resources

- Visit our website: [Sports, Recreation and Being Active During COVID-19 - Ottawa Public Health](#)
- To help owners/operators of outdoor recreational amenities to comply with the requirements of this LOI, [signage](#) is available on Ottawa Public Health's Business and Workplace webpage.
- [Sign-up](#) to receive COVID-19 updates via email from Ottawa Public Health
- COVID-19 Information Phone Line: 613-580-6744

Q. What is a Letter of Instruction (LOI)?

- A.** A Letter of Instruction is used to make additional requirements not set out in the [Reopening Ontario Act \(ROA\)](#). Requirements within the Letter of Instructions are considered mandatory and legally enforceable under the ROA.

Q. What gives Ottawa Public Health the authority to mandate this in addition to what the Province has already implemented?

- A.** On August 24, 2021, amendments were made to both Step 3 and the Roadmap Exit Step in [O.Reg 364/20](#), under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act \(ROA\)](#), to require businesses or organizations to comply with any advice, recommendations and instructions related to COVID-19 vaccination policies that are issued by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health or by a medical officer of health after consultation with the OCMOH.

Q. Who does this LOI apply to and when does it come into effect?

- A.** This LOI applies to all persons residing in or present in the Ottawa region who own, operate or are responsible for an outdoor recreational amenity permitted to be open under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to Covid-19\) Act, 2020 \(the "ROA"\)](#). The requirements of this LOI come into effect as of December 26, 2021 at 12:01am until further notice.

Q. Why are the capacity limits of Outdoor Recreation Amenities lower than capacity of Recreational Spaces indoors?

- A.** The capacity limit is aligned with the indoor requirements of the number of people that can maintain 2 metre physical distance up to a maximum of 50% capacity. While the risk of transmission of COVID-19, on average, is greater in indoor spaces compared to outdoors, the risk of transmission is elevated in outdoor spaces when there is crowding, close contact, prolonged exposure and forceful exhalation (e.g., individuals physically exerting themselves by participating in sports and recreation activities).

The capacity limits for outdoor skating rinks, other than skating trails and outdoor refrigerated rinks, would be 25 persons or the maximum number of persons that can maintain a two-metre physical distance. The capacity limits being set within this LOI aligns and provides greater clarity around the provincial guidance for outdoor gatherings announced on December 17th. For outdoor refrigerated rinks including City Hall Rink of Dreams, Jim Tubman Chevrolet Rink of Dreams, Lansdowne Park Skating Court and Ben Franklin Place Skating Rink, the maximum capacity shall be limited to posted capacity limits and require that the maximum number of persons indicated on the sign maintain a two (2) metre distance.

Q. What is the difference between Indoor Recreational Spaces and Outdoor Recreational Amenities that require this additional clarity on capacity?

A. The Province has currently implemented a capacity limit in indoor recreational amenities and requires proof of vaccination to access. While the risk of transmission of COVID-19, on average, is greater in indoor spaces compared to outdoors the use of indoor recreational place is primarily rental based where one team or one household is reserving the space at once. In contrast, outdoor spaces are open to public and have greater opportunity to have multiple households intermingling within one area and there is no proof of vaccination requirement. COVID-19 transmission is also increased when there is crowding, close contact, prolonged exposure and forceful exhalation (e.g., individuals physically exerting themselves by participating in sports and recreation activities). Additionally, Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Vera Etches announced a strong recommendation on December 17th to temporarily suspend indoor and team sports.

Q. Why is this LOI being released when there is no ability for enforcement on the public and only on the owners and operators of Outdoor Recreational Amenities?

A. Owners, Operators, and other persons responsible for an Outdoor Recreational Amenity in the City of Ottawa must implement the measures outlined within the Letter of Instruction. These additional measures provide clarity to the Provincial restrictions announced on December 17th, 2021. All measures being implemented by OPH and the Province are asking the public to limit gathering.

Q. What are the posted capacity limits for outdoor refrigerated rinks?

A. The maximum capacity will be limited for the four City outdoor refrigerated rinks, listed below. Each rink will have their own capacity limits posted on-site. Two-metre distancing rules apply. [Rink operating hours](#) are on the City website.

- City Hall Rink of Dreams
- Jim Tubman Chevrolet Rink of Dreams
- Lansdowne Park Skating Court
- Ben Franklin Place Skating Rink

Neighbourhood outdoor rinks and ice pads, when weather conditions allow them to open, will have a 25-person capacity limit or the maximum number of persons that can maintain a two (2) metre distance. More details and updates can be found on ottawa.ca/skating.

Q. What is an Outdoor Recreational Amenity?

A. An "Outdoor Recreational Amenity" means any land, premises, location or thing at, upon, in or near which an authorized outdoor recreation or sport activity takes place and to which the public is ordinarily invited or permitted access, either expressly or by

implication, whether a fee is charged for entry. For greater clarity this includes but is not limited to ice rinks, tobogganing hills, snowmobile, cross country ski, ice skating and snowshoe trails.

Q. Does this LOI impact indoor spaces (bathrooms, rental areas or change rooms)?

A. Yes. Indoor change rooms at Outdoor Recreational Amenities, and indoor clubhouses excluding bathrooms or to access a rental counter, are to be **closed to the public** and only accessed by employees and designated volunteers for maintenance and operation of the Outdoor Recreational Amenity. The maximum number of persons at any time in indoor bathrooms or accessing a rental counter is limited to the number that can maintain a two (2) meter physical distance. Mandatory mask requirements are extended to public washrooms with signage to indicate this is required.

Q. What is the reason masks are being required around outdoor spaces but not when engaged in physical activity?

A. Masks are highly recommended when engaged in physical activity but not mandatory. While the risk of transmission of COVID-19, on average, is greater in indoor spaces compared to outdoors, the risk of transmission is elevated in outdoor spaces when there is crowding, close contact, prolonged exposure and forceful exhalation (e.g., individuals physically exerting themselves by participating in sports and recreation activities).

Q. Does OPH have evidence of outdoor transmission of COVID-19?

A. COVID-19 levels are high in Ottawa and with the increased transmissibility of Omicron, it's more likely a person can encounter someone who may have COVID-19 without realizing it, who is asymptomatic. While the risk of transmission of COVID-19, on average, is greater in indoor spaces compared to outdoors, the risk of transmission is elevated in outdoor spaces when there is crowding, close contact, prolonged exposure and forceful exhalation (e.g., individuals physically exerting themselves by participating in sports and recreation activities).

A [real world contact tracing example](#) was published by OPH of COVID-19 transmission from an outdoor setting in Ottawa.

Q. How does this impact National Capital Commission (NCC) places like the Rideau Canal or Bruce Pit and other trails?

A. Capacity limits may apply to areas where people congregate within the amenities such as the canal access points and trail heads on NCC parkland that are prone to crowding.

Regardless of the location, residents are encouraged to maintain the 2 metre (6ft) physical distance between persons outside their household and avoid crowding to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

Q. Does this mean only 25 people can park in a parking lot?

A. No. More than 25 people can park in a parking lot at an outdoor recreational amenity, however at any given time individuals must comply with posted capacity limits. It is recommended that people park, and then move along to the trail and not congregate in the parking lots before or after the activity while always maintaining physical distance.

Q. Does this mean only 25 people can be on a tobogganing hill?

A. No. The capacity limits are applicable to the areas where people may congregate. For example, at the top and bottom of the hill. At all times, people are required to keep 2 metres distance from those outside your household. So, if a hill is small (e.g. 25 people cannot keep 2 metres physical distance), the top of the hill may have a lower total capacity.

Q. Will the capacity limits create additional crowding waiting for access to the ice rinks?

- A.** Those waiting their turn to skate, are required to maintain 2 meters (6ft) physical distance from persons outside their household while in queue.

Being vigilant with respect to crowding in areas is going to take collaboration, everyone has a role to play.

- If you are enjoying the rink while others are waiting, consider limiting your duration on the amenity to allow others to enjoy.
- For parents/guardians who are supervising recreational activities, consider only having one adult member of the family attending.
- For those waiting for your turn, keep the appropriate physical distance from persons outside your household.
- For those visiting a location or amenity that is busy, seriously consider leaving and returning at another time which may not be as popular and therefore less occupied.

Q. What do I need to do while just walking/biking through a park or NCC property on trails?

- A.** Wearing a mask is required at trailheads and around the designated outdoor recreational amenities. You are not required to wear a mask when on the trails and can maintain physical distancing of a minimum of 2m between yourself and others from outside your household. Ottawa Public Health strongly recommends having a mask with you when leaving the house. This will allow for you to have easy access to the additional layer of protection in any circumstances that might arise on your outing including times when physical distancing may not be possible.

Q. Is hockey permitted?

- A.** Team sports or any game/ sport must meet the physical distancing requirements outlined within the Letter of Instructions and also follow the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act \(ROA\)](#).

Q. What is considered a tobogganing hill?

- A.** Tobogganing hills are outdoor recreation areas which are authorized or promoted for that activity. For example, the City of Ottawa has identified [57 approved tobogganing hills](#).

Q. What is the difference between the gathering limits of a private backyard rink and the capacity limits in this Order?

- A.** Gathering limits put in place by the Province are applicable to an organized public event, indoor social gathering, outdoor social gathering or public event, and certain type of ceremonies (often an event or a party). Capacity limits consider the number of people in a public space that arrive spontaneously. Backyard rinks would follow the [provincial regulations](#) and public health advice for gatherings in private residences.