



# Rising COVID-19 Case Numbers Prompt Province-wide Shutdown

December 22, 2020

On December 21, 2020, the Ontario government confirmed a widely expected mandatory shutdown as the province recorded more than 2,000 new COVID-19 cases for the sixth consecutive day on Sunday. Beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Boxing Day (Saturday, December 26, 2020), the entire province will be subject to additional restrictions and Ontarians will be expected to remain at home to the extent possible, except for outings of a necessary or urgent nature, in order to reduce the transmission of the virus. The province-wide shutdown is currently set to last 28 days in the southern portions of the province, and 14 days in northern Ontario. Notably, the province-wide shutdown will have its own rules, separate and apart from the recently implemented colour-coded **COVID-19 Response Framework**, which is temporarily being paused for the duration of the shutdown.

**The provincial government has confirmed that measures will include, but not be limited to:**

- Restricting indoor organized public events and social gatherings to members of a single household, with a limited exception for individuals who live alone and who may consider having exclusive close contact with one other household;
- Prohibiting in-person shopping in most retail settings, while allowing curbside pickup and delivery to continue;
- Restricting discount and big box retailers selling groceries to 25% in-store capacity, and restricting pharmacies, supermarkets, grocery stores and similar stores that primarily sell food to 50% in-store capacity;
- Restricting indoor access to shopping malls, including by mandating that patrons only be permitted to go to a designated indoor pickup area (by appointment only), to essential retail stores that are permitted to be open, or, subject to physical distancing and mask requirements, to the food court for takeout purchases, and
- Prohibiting indoor and outdoor dining at restaurants, bars, and other food or drink establishments, while allowing takeout, drive-through and delivery to continue.

Employers in all industries are asked to make every effort to allow employees to work from home during the province-wide shutdown.

## **New School Protocols**

The province-wide shutdown brings with it new temporary protocols for schools. Briefly:



- All publicly-funded and private elementary and secondary schools will move to teacher-led remote learning when students return from the winter break on January 4, 2021.
- As of January 11, 2021, all elementary and secondary schools in specified public health regions - which include Algoma, North Bay Parry Sound, Northwestern, Porcupine, Sudbury and District, Thunder Bay District and Timiskaming - will be permitted to resume in-person learning.
- For all other public health regions in the province, elementary school students will also be permitted to resume in-person learning as of January 11, 2021. However, secondary students will be required to continue to learn remotely until January 25, 2021, at which point they may resume in-person learning.
- School boards will be expected to make provisions for continued in-person support for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning for whom remote learning is challenging.

During the province-wide shutdown, it is important to note that child care centres, authorized recreational and skill-building programs, or home-based child care services will remain open. That being said, from January 4 to 8, 2021, while elementary students are engaged in remote learning, before and after school programs will be closed. However, emergency child care for health care and frontline workers will be made available again during this time, as it was earlier during the pandemic.

## **In Our View**

Employers who may be worried in the face of this second shutdown period may wish to look into the newly announced Ontario Small Business Support Grant (“Grant”), which will be available to eligible small business that are required to close or significantly restrict their services as a result of the province-wide shutdown. The new Grant will provide a minimum of \$10,000 and up to \$20,000 to eligible businesses to use in whatever way makes the most sense for their business as they navigate the challenges of COVID-19, including, for example, to cover wages and rent payments or to maintain inventory. More information about the new Grant can be found on the [Ontario government’s website](#). The Ontario government has indicated that further details, including how to apply, will be announced in January 2021.

For more information on your rights and obligations as an employer dealing with COVID-19 or related issues, please contact [Vicky Satta](#) at 613-940-2753, [Paul Marshall](#) at 613-940-2754, [Sophie Gagnier](#) at 613-940-2756, [Joël Rocque](#) at 613-563-7660 ext.310 or [Jennifer Birrell](#) at 613-940-2740.