

A Framework for Reopening our Province

April 27, 2020

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A Framework for Reopening our Province

The impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak have been felt across Ontario, by families, workers, businesses and communities.

By working together and following the advice of public health experts, together we made steady progress in the fight against this deadly virus. Modelling in mid-April 2020 shows early signs that enhanced public health measures — including staying home, physical distancing and hand washing — are working to stop the spread of the virus and flatten the curve of the outbreak. By following these simple steps, everyone across the province is making a positive difference.

It has been a slow and steady fight, but every victory Ontario has made against COVID-19 belongs to our heroic health care workers on the frontlines of this pandemic, essential businesses and workers, those stepping up to produce much-needed medical gear, and the regular people making extraordinary sacrifices to keep their families, friends and communities safe.

While the situation is still evolving, Ontario continues to work with its partners to keep people healthy and provide support for the families, individuals and businesses struggling as a result of the necessary measures taken in response to COVID-19 and to plan for what comes next.

And now, led by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the work of the Ontario Jobs and Recovery Committee, the government is planning for what comes next.

A Framework for Reopening our Province lays out the government's approach to the next chapter in the ongoing fight to defeat COVID-19. It outlines the principles the government will use to reopening businesses, services and public spaces in gradual stages. It also explains the criteria Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health will use to help advise the government on when it is safe to begin loosening public health restrictions. And it highlights the government's commitment to continue providing guidance and advice as workplaces prepare to reopen, including businesses deemed essential that voluntarily chose to temporarily shut down.

Thanks to the hard work of public health professionals and frontline heroes, and the ongoing commitment of the people of this province, Ontario is confident that together we will continue to make progress in our fight to contain and defeat this deadly virus. This framework provides a roadmap for people and businesses, so they know what to look for as the province moves forward. Together, Ontario will emerge from this crisis — with a clear path to economic recovery that keeps people safe and healthy.

Ontario's Response to COVID-19

Phase 1: Protect and Support



The government's primary focus is on protecting the health and well-being of individuals and families, supporting frontline health care workers, essential workers and businesses, and providing immediate support to protect people and jobs. This is demonstrated through the \$17-billion [Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19](#) and ongoing government actions, such as increased pay for frontline workers during the pandemic.

Emergency orders put in place to protect people include: the closure of non-essential workplaces, outdoor amenities in parks, recreational areas and public places, as well as bars and restaurants; restrictions on social gatherings; and limiting staff from working in more than one retirement home, long-term care home or congregate care setting.

Phase 2: Restart



The government will take a careful, stage-by-stage approach to loosening emergency measures and reopening Ontario's economy. Public health and workplace safety will remain the top priority, while balancing the needs of people and businesses. Public health officials will carefully monitor each stage for two-to-four weeks, as they assess the evolution of the COVID-19 outbreak to determine if it is necessary to change course to maintain public health. The government will also continue to issue guidelines for workplace safety.



Phase 3: Recover



Ensuring the health and safety of the public and workers will continue to be a top priority as Ontario transitions to a "new normal." The government will partner with businesses and other sectors to lead Ontario's economic recovery. The focus will be on creating jobs and opportunity across the province, while working to restore long-term prosperity for the benefit of every individual and family in Ontario.

State of Play in Ontario's Response to COVID-19

The government acted immediately and decisively to slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health and safety of the people of Ontario. Thanks to these actions, the latest expert modelling projects that the wave of new community spread of COVID-19 cases has started to peak as Ontario's outbreak is now trending positively.

- **January 24** Minister's Order made the novel coronavirus a reportable disease
- **January 25 – ongoing** Rapid testing ramp-up
Aggressive case and contact management of all confirmed cases
- **March 12** Closure of public schools
- **March 13** Essential visitors only in long-term care and other congregate care settings
Stop cycling of intermittent inmates and personal visits in correctional facilities
Prohibit gatherings over 250 people
- **March 16** Practice physical distancing
Self-isolate for 14 days if travelled outside Canada
Prohibit gatherings over 50 people
Make virtual work arrangements where possible
- **March 17** Emergency Declaration
Closure of public places and establishments
- **March 21** Work deployment for health services providers
- **March 24** Closure of non-essential workplaces
Work deployment for long-term care homes
- **March 25** Prohibit gatherings greater than five people
Release of the \$17-billion *Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19*
- **March 30** Closure of parks and outdoor recreational amenities
Limit outings to essential needs
Self-isolation for those over 70, with compromised immune systems or underlying medical conditions
- **April 2** Enhance capacity for contact-tracing
- **April 3** Revised essential workplaces list
- **April 9** Prohibit camping on Crown land
- **April 11** Work deployment for service organizations, municipalities and their service providers
- **April 14** Extension of Emergency Declaration for 28 days
- **April 15** Release of *COVID-19 Action Plan for Long-Term Care Homes*, including the Emergency Order restricting staff from working in more than one setting
- **April 22** Ontario requests military support for long-term care homes
- **April 23** Release of *COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People*
- **April 25** Ontario provides pandemic pay for frontline heroes
- **April 27** Release of *A Framework for Reopening our Province*

Principles of the Framework

Ontario's plan to begin to responsibly lift public health measures and restart the economy will be guided by the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and public health officials, and will be based on the following principles:



Responsible: Public health and protecting the people of Ontario, especially those who are most vulnerable and at high-risk, will continue to be paramount and guide a gradual approach to loosening public health measures.



Evidence-informed: Emerging scientific knowledge, public health data, defined criteria and consistent measures will inform the actions of the government, regions and sectors.



Resourced: Sufficient health system capacity to respond to any resurgence in COVID-19 infections will be required to protect health care workers and the public and maintain the regular health system.



Monitored: Public health capacity for rigorous testing, timely contact tracing and case management will need to be in place.



Responsive and Effective: Measures will be implemented quickly, clearly and efficiently, based on health capacity, safety and economic needs, and the need to tighten or restrict measures if surges or further outbreaks occur.



Clear: Plans and responsibilities for individuals, employers and the health care system will be clear, well-communicated by government and ready to implement.

Flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances are essential to the province's continued success. As the situation evolves, these principles will guide the actions and direction the government takes to reopen Ontario and its economy.

Determining When to Ease Public Health Measures

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health will consider the following criteria to advise when the province can begin to ease public health measures:



Virus spread and containment



Health system capacity



Public health system capacity

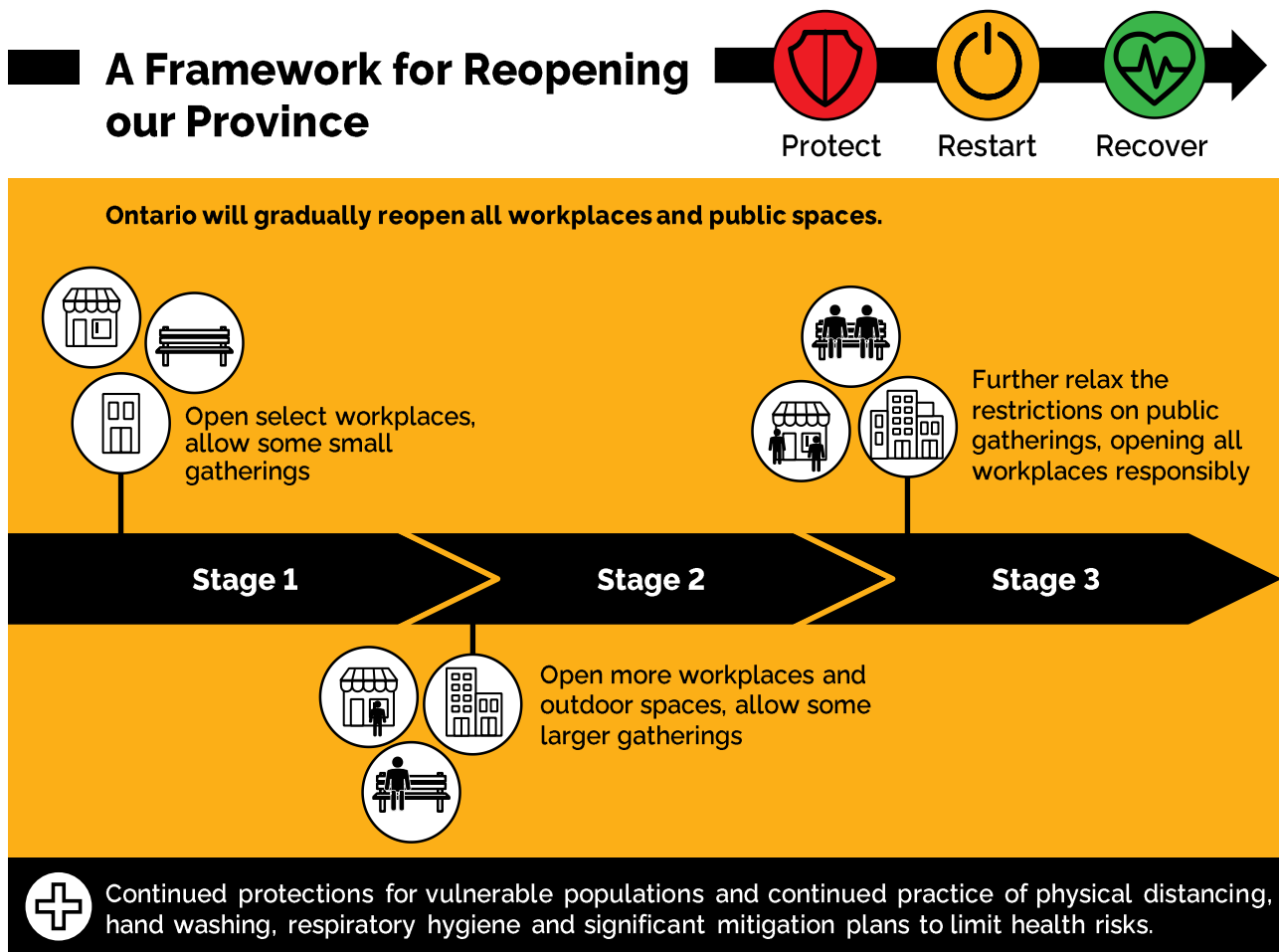


Incidence tracking capacity

<p>Ensures loosening of measures is appropriately timed with the progression of the epidemic in Ontario.</p>	<p>Ensures there is an effective response to any potential case resurgence.</p>	<p>Ensures there is an effective public health response to any potential case resurgence.</p>	<p>Ensures that any potential resurgence in cases can be identified promptly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consistent two-to-four week decrease in the number of new daily COVID-19 cases. • A decrease in the rate of cases that cannot be traced to a source. • A decrease in the number of new COVID-19 cases in hospitals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient acute and critical care capacity, including access to ventilators, to effectively respond to potential surges. • Ongoing availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) based on provincial directives and guidelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 90 per cent of new COVID-19 contacts are being reached by local public health officials within one day, with guidance and direction to contain community spread. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing testing of suspected COVID-19 cases, especially of vulnerable populations, to detect new outbreaks quickly. • A shift to new and other ways of testing and contact tracing to promote widespread tracking of cases.

As the province eases public health measures, these criteria will also serve as the framework for ongoing monitoring of progress and identifying when a change in direction is required. For example, the Chief Medical Officer of Health may also advise reapplying certain public health measures to manage the risk of recurring surges, outbreaks or future waves.

Phase 2: Restart — A Gradual, Staged Approach



The government will reopen Ontario businesses and public spaces gradually. This will be based on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, including the criteria and thresholds detailed above. Each stage will last for approximately two-to-four-week periods to allow for close monitoring of any impacts or potential resurgence of cases.

After each two-to-four-week period, the Chief Medical Officer of Health may advise to:

- Reapply or tighten certain public health measures in response to a surge in cases or outbreaks;
- Maintain status quo and continue close monitoring of impacts; or
- Progress to the next two-to-four-week stage.

As public health measures are lifted and as economic activity resumes, the public will need to continue to maintain physical distancing and hand washing, along with self-isolation when experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. Remote work arrangements should continue where feasible.

By taking this incremental approach, the government can ensure there are appropriate measures in place to reopen the province safely and limit any risks to people and public health. Each stage requires careful assessment and monitoring to know whether to adjust, tighten or loosen measures.

Supporting Children and Parents

The government is committed to keeping children across Ontario safe. In considering how to reopen Ontario's economy, the government recognizes the important needs of both parents and children in relation to public health decisions about when and how to open schools and child care centres. As with all other measures, the government will proceed slowly and in phases, based on the best advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health. In reopening, the government will ensure the safety of children and educators by ensuring adherence to public health guidelines.

Reopening in Stages

Examples of the government's gradual approach to reopening Ontario include:

Stage 1

Initially, consider:



For businesses that were ordered to close or restrict operations, opening select workplaces that can immediately meet or modify operations to meet public health guidance and occupational health and safety requirements (e.g., curbside pick-up or delivery).



Opening some outdoor spaces like parks and allow for a greater number of individuals to attend some events, such as funerals.



Continued protections for vulnerable populations and the continued practice of physical distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene, and significant mitigation plans to limit health risks. Hospitals beginning to offer some non-urgent and scheduled surgeries and other health care services.

Stage 2

If the initial loosening of public health measures is successful, consider:



Opening more workplaces, based on risk assessments, which may include some service industries, and additional office and retail workplaces.



Opening more outdoor spaces and allowing some larger public gatherings.



Continued protections for vulnerable populations and the continued practice of physical distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene, and significant mitigation plans to limit health risks.

Stage 3

If the loosening of public health measures continues to be successful, consider:



Opening all workplaces responsibly



Further relaxing the restrictions on public gatherings. Large public gatherings such as concerts and sporting events will continue to be restricted for the foreseeable future.



Continued protections for vulnerable populations and the continued practice of physical distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene, and significant mitigation plans to limit health risks.

This ongoing, gradual assessment of public health measures will continue until the post-pandemic period when a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 is available. This staged approach reflects Ontario's "new normal."

This framework allows the government to prioritize the needs of individuals and families across the province, while balancing economic and social benefits and keeping people safe. To help businesses and services restart, key factors the government will consider include the risk of spread of the virus and the ability to implement protective measures to keep workplaces safe.

In the coming days, the Ontario Jobs and Recovery Committee, as well as Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), will begin holding discussions with business associations, chambers of commerce, municipal leaders, the postsecondary sector, corporate leaders, small business owners, community and social service providers, Indigenous partners, Franco-Ontarians, entrepreneurs and others. This will enable Ontario to better understand the unique impacts of COVID-19 that each region and each sector is facing, as well as what they need to succeed as Ontario progresses through the stages of reopening toward the recovery phase.

Making Workplaces Safe

The health and safety of workers is the government's top concern. As public health measures are adjusted, ensuring workplaces are safe for employees and customers will be essential. All employers and workers will be required to follow directives and guidelines on COVID-19, including measures that may restrict certain activities.

In fact, many key sectors deemed essential have remained open during the COVID-19 outbreak, following strict guidance to help their employees stay safe. It is vital that they continue to do so. The government will rely on their expertise and, in many cases, global experience to serve as a model for how other businesses adjust their operations for a new environment. The government will help with a range of advice and support.

Safe workplaces must have a plan that promotes and adheres to strict hygiene and sanitation standards, and physical distancing to the extent possible. These are key factors to resume activities safely. The use of measures to limit risks include adjusting work practices and physical environments. This applies to workplaces that are allowed to reopen, as well as businesses deemed essential but that voluntarily chose to shut down, recognizing they may decide to resume operations before entering the first stage.

The government, in partnership with Ontario's Health and Safety Associations and based on input from public health officials, will provide guidelines to employers on how to open safely and protect their employees and customers. Documents will be made available across many sectors, as well as training to provide guidance to workplaces entering the restart phase. This may include webinars and other distance learning tools. These resources will build on the guidelines provided to essential workplaces, which have enabled those businesses to adapt and remain open.

Ontario has added more workplace inspectors and specialists to ensure workers continue to be protected on the job during the pandemic, including adding close to 60 new frontline officials to support employers and workers in the field. The capacity of Ontario's Health and Safety Call Centre has also been doubled. Workers who are worried their workplaces are unsafe can phone 1-877-202-0008. Regular updates will also be provided on the number of workplace inspections and work orders taking place across the province.

Throughout the reopening phase, Ontario will continue the "Team Canada" approach to understand the measures and steps other jurisdictions are taking, to coordinate where possible, and reduce barriers to interprovincial business activities.

Protecting Vulnerable Populations

Nothing is more important than protecting the health and well-being of the people of Ontario, especially the province's most vulnerable populations. Seeing the impact of COVID-19 on seniors and vulnerable people has been heartbreaking.

As Ontario gradually loosens public health restrictions and economic activity resumes, the government will continue to use every resource available to support the province's long-term care homes to stop the spread of COVID-19, with a special focus on those long-term care homes experiencing outbreaks and in need of urgent support.

The [COVID-19 Action Plan for Protecting Long-Term Care Homes](#) is helping to stop and contain the spread of COVID-19 in the province's long-term care and retirement homes. The government has introduced more aggressive testing, screening and surveillance, deployed specialized teams from hospitals, public health and the home care sector, recruited additional frontline staff, and increased personal protective equipment.

Ontario is also implementing its [COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People](#) to better protect people living in high-risk settings including homes serving those with developmental disabilities, shelters for survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking, and children's residential settings. This includes Indigenous residential settings for children and youth, shelters and other high-risk settings on- and off-reserve.

New measures have been put in place to enhance screening and testing, help reduce exposure to COVID-19, prevent the spread of the virus and increase infection control measures. This plan builds upon the initiatives that were put in place at the outset of the COVID-19 outbreak.

A Path to Recovery

Through each stage of *A Framework to Reopening our Province*, the government's number one priority will continue to be the health and well-being of the people of Ontario. But recovery from COVID-19 doesn't just mean stopping the spread — it also means setting up Ontario to help create jobs, prosperity and growth well into the future.

As we prepare to reopen Ontario's economy, it is more important than ever to follow public health advice. Everyday actions to reduce exposure and protect people's health, such as physical distancing, frequent hand washing and staying home when ill, continue to be crucial in Ontario's fight against COVID-19. We cannot afford to let up our efforts now and undo all of the progress we have made. Together, we are making a difference.

Ontario is resilient. With everyone doing their part and the heroic efforts of frontline health care workers, our efforts against COVID-19 are working. Now, the government is preparing for the weeks and months ahead, to responsibly lead Ontario's economy back to a strong position. The Ontario Spirit will continue to guide us through these challenging times.

The perseverance of the people of Ontario has always been our province's strength. With a clear framework to help guide the loosening of emergency measures, and with the continued support of the people of this province, Ontario stands ready to tackle the next chapter in the fight against COVID-19.

Additional resources

- [Learn more about the first phase of Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19.](#)
- [Learn more about the COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People.](#)
- [Learn more about the COVID-19 Action Plan for Protecting Long-Term Care Homes.](#)
- [Visit Ontario's website to learn more about how the province continues to protect the people of Ontario from COVID-19.](#)
- [See how your organization can help fight COVID-19 through Ontario Together.](#)
- [Information and advice to help your business navigate the economy during COVID-19.](#)