



**St. Thomas Site**  
Administrative Office  
1230 Talbot Street  
St. Thomas, ON  
N5P 1G9

**Woodstock Site**  
410 Buller Street  
Woodstock, ON  
N4S 4N2

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## **RE: Workplace Vaccination Policies Strongly Recommended**

**To:** Employers and Business Operators in Elgin County, Oxford County, and the City of St. Thomas

Workplaces across our community have worked hard to control the spread of COVID-19; we truly appreciate the sacrifices you have made and your adherence to public health measures.

You may have heard that Ontario has entered the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the more transmissible and dangerous Delta variant dominating. This fall, the risk of COVID-19 transmission in workplaces still exists; we continue to see cases and outbreaks in many workplaces and public settings.

To avoid more restrictive public health measures and closures of workplaces across our community, we need to work together to make workplaces and indoor settings as safe as possible. Employers have an obligation to maintain a safe work environment and take every precaution reasonable to protect their workers under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. Many public health measures are already in place to help keep workplaces safe and open, including mandatory masking indoors, physical distancing, and screening of employees. However, the COVID-19 vaccine is one of the best ways to protect your workplace from the risks of COVID-19. The vaccine is safe and effective at reducing virus spread and protecting against serious illness, hospitalization, and death.

As of September 19<sup>th</sup>, 78.8% of the eligible population (12+) in our community is fully vaccinated. However, we must continue to reach more individuals to achieve our goal of at least 90% of the eligible population being fully immunized. Workplaces can help encourage vaccination by implementing a voluntary vaccination policy to prevent new cases, outbreaks, deaths, and business closures.

**Therefore, I strongly recommend all employers and business operators institute a workplace vaccination policy that ensures staff, volunteers, on-site contractors, and other personnel are fully vaccinated (if eligible) to protect their employees and the public from COVID-19.** Workplace vaccination policies will help safeguard your work environment and help us achieve higher overall vaccination in the population.

To support you in developing this policy, Southwestern Public Health has created a “Guidance on Developing Workplace Vaccination Policies.” This includes a sample policy letter that you can adapt for use in your workplace. Please visit [www.swpublichealth.ca/WorkplacesCOVID19](http://www.swpublichealth.ca/WorkplacesCOVID19) to access this electronic guidance.

Your workplace policy should be in writing and adhere to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, and privacy laws.

**Additionally, I wish to highlight critical public health measures which all workplaces should be implementing, if not already, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.**

- **Ensure Compliance with Proof of Vaccination Requirements outlined by the Province:** Effective September 22, 2021, the [Provincial government will require](#) Ontarians to be fully vaccinated and provide proof of vaccination along with photo ID to access higher risk public settings and facilities. Therefore, all settings and facilities identified by the Province should ensure that they are in compliance with these requirements as soon as possible.
- **COVID-19 Screening:** All employees, even those fully vaccinated, must be screened for COVID-19 every day before attending work on-site or in-person. The provincial workplace screening tool can be found at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/screening/worker/>. Workers who fail active screening (by answering any question 'yes' in the provincial screening tool) must get tested and be restricted from entering the workplace.
- **Remote Work:** Enable employees to work from home wherever reasonably possible.
- **Physical Distancing:** Ensure the number of employees on-site is limited so that physical distancing of 2 metres between employees can be maintained. Employees should be provided with a safe space to take their breaks that allows for physical distancing when face coverings are removed for eating.
- **Face Coverings:** Face coverings that cover the mouth, nose and chin must be worn in all indoor spaces, with limited exceptions. Fully vaccinated employees must still comply with face covering requirements. If employees work within 2 metres of individuals not wearing a face covering, eye protection is also required. See [Ontario Regulation 364/20](#) for more information.
- **Rapid Antigen Testing:** Rapid tests are a tool to help screen asymptomatic employees for COVID-19. It is one of many other measures that can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. Unvaccinated staff should be tested at least once per week, and preferably 2-3 times per week. Employees who screen positive should go to a local assessment centre to obtain a PCR test to confirm if they are infected with COVID-19. Provincial guidance is available for organizations interested in using rapid tests to screen asymptomatic employees before entering the workplace (see <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/provincial-antigen-screening-program>).

Implementation of these critical public health measures will ensure that the risk of COVID-19 transmission is reduced in our workplaces and businesses. Thank you for being such a critical part of the solution and for your ongoing commitment to your employees and patrons' wellbeing and to the pandemic response in Ontario.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joyce Lock, MD, MSC, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health  
Southwestern Public Health