

Public Health issues vaccination order for fitness facilities

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Coaches, instructors, sports officials, and volunteers will now need to show proof of vaccination at Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph sports and fitness facilities, following an order from the region's top doctor.

Dr. Nicola Mercer, medical officer of health for Wellington-Dufferin Guelph, issued a letter of instruction on Sept. 23 adding these individuals, who were left out of the provincial proof of vaccination requirement, to the list of those required to be fully vaccinated.

On Sept. 22 Ontario Regulation 364/20 went into effect, mandating patrons show proof of full vaccination to COVID-19 at a number of high-risk settings including indoor facilities used for sports and recreational fitness activities.

The mandate included patrons 18 years of age and older entering for the purpose of participating in an organized sport and patrons 12 years and older who enter for other reasons such as a spectator.

Excluded from the mandate were coaches, instructors, sports officials, and volunteers.

"Because these individuals are necessary for the operation of organized sports, they will have close and prolonged contact with vulnerable youth who are unvaccinated," wrote Mercer in the letter. "As a result, and by way of this Letter of Instruction, I am requiring proof of vaccination for individuals who support indoor organized sports (including recreational fitness activities), in addition to the individuals prescribed by provincial regulation.

"Requiring these individuals to be fully vaccinated provides enhanced protection for our community and further curbs the local risk associated with indoor organized sports."

Facilities used for sport and recreational fitness activities that are subject to the mandate include: gyms, fitness/sporting/recreational facilities, dance studios, yoga studios, gymnastic centres, dojo/martial art studios, tennis clubs, pools, waterparks, and other premises where sporting events are played or spectated or where recreational fitness activities or personal fitness training occurs.

The letter of instruction issued by Mercer noted that the rate of COVID-19 cases in unvaccinated individuals is consistently higher than fully vaccinated people.

"COVID-19 will continue to pose a threat in our community as long as a significant number of people remain unvaccinated," wrote Mercer. "We need to remain vigilant to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 as much as possible."

With the new order, those who fail to comply could face a \$750 fine for individuals and \$1,000 for corporations. Maximum penalties for not complying include a \$100,000 fine and up to one year in jail for an individual; a \$500,000 fine and up to one year in jail for a director or officer of a corporation; and up to \$10 million for a corporation.

Questions about the instructions can be directed to Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health COVID-19 Call Centre at 519-822-2715 ext. 4020.