



Changes to NWT Public Health Orders **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

What are the new travel requirements?

As of March 1, 2022, changes to Public Health Orders will outline revised after-travel requirements that will be in place until the end of the Public Health Emergency. These changes include:

Self-isolation after travel will no longer be required, however, Self-Isolation Plans (SIPs) must still be submitted. All visitors and residents can travel to NWT, regardless of purpose but must still file SIPs.

- SIPs must be filed with ProtectNWT **within** 24 hours for returning residents
- SIPs must be filed with ProtectNWT 24 hours **in advance** for non-residents.
- SIPs assist in screening some returning travellers through testing after travel. Those requiring testing are persons:
 - Traveling to small communities
 - Returning from international travel
 - Working or volunteering with high risk or vulnerable persons
 - If additional testing guidance has been provided by a public health official
- SIPs require that symptom checks and self-monitoring take place for all travellers.

Why do SIPs need to be filed if people no longer need to self-isolate?

Before the end of the Public Health Emergency, the NWT will experience increased travel during Spring Break. During this period of heightened travel and reduced requirements, SIPs enable the NWT Chief Public Health Officer to maintain additional awareness of importation risks through monitoring. The information from SIPs assists in directing additional resources to communities if necessary. SIPs also allow for enforcement of symptom checks and testing requirements.

What other changes to current restrictions have been made?

Current gathering requirements outlined through Public Health Orders will no longer be in effect as of March 1, 2022. Instead, the Chief Public Health Officer has outlined a series of [recommendations for gatherings](#).

Will I still need to present a Proof of Vaccination Credentials (PVC) to enter places or attend events?

Since there are no gathering limits, the requirement for a Proof of Vaccine Credential (PVC) program will be eliminated as of March 1, 2022. Businesses (such as restaurants or retail outlets), organizations (such as workplaces or those holding events), employers and communities may choose to implement their own PVC requirements, so it is a good idea to ask about PVC requirements before making plans to attend or participate. There are also federal requirements, such as airline travel, that remain in effect. The NWT PVC program provided by the GNWT is aligned with the requirements of the Government of Canada, and will remain in effect.



Why is this happening now?

The public health risk analysis used to mitigate restrictions is no longer focused on decreased transmission of COVID-19. As the Omicron variant generally causes less severe disease than previous variants, the focus is instead targeted at protecting those who are at higher risk of severe outcomes. The landscape has changed due to the Omicron variant's differing behaviour. We are at a stage where we are able to manage COVID-19 like other respiratory viruses such as influenza. Although these viruses can have severe outcomes for certain populations, we are able to manage them through targeted clinical approaches and treatment, rather than through broad public health orders.

This is a significant change we must prepare for. Change is not easy for everyone, especially after living under restrictions for nearly two years. It is important to give residents time to adjust to the need to manage risks that still exist as personal, organizational, and corporate responsibilities. For more information please see [Setting your Safety Nets](#).

Why not just remove all requirements now?

The GNWT is taking an incremental, step-by-step approach to ending the Public Health Emergency, as outlined in Emerging Wisely 2021. While we are shifting our concern to the protection of those at highest risk and away from case counts and transmission, we must do so using a measured approach. Between now and the end of the Public Health Emergency the NWT Chief Public Health Officer will still be closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation in the territory and will act quickly when and if required.

When will all requirements be removed?

All requirements under the current Public Health Orders will be removed at the end of the Public Health Emergency. It is anticipated the Public Health Emergency will be declared over on March 31, 2022. This will happen once COVID-19 cases have decreased further as is anticipated, and after the Spring Break in March when travel is expected to be higher than usual. At that time recommendations will still be provided for protecting public health.

How do we protect people at high risk?

We all need to find ways to live with COVID-19. This means minimizing our own personal risk and the risk of those around us. This factors into how communities, employers and organizations make decisions about planning and preparing organizationally, logistically, and financially. For example, practicing making our own risk assessments is encouraged. See [Setting your Safety Nets](#) for more information about how this can be done well. These tools can be used by residents, communities, employers and organizations.

As with other communicable diseases, the CPHO will continue to provide recommendations. Now that the order that determines gathering requirements has been removed, the CPHO has provided some [recommendations](#) about what should be considered when organizing an event.



People at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 should consider taking additional personal measures to protect themselves. This includes understanding and practicing healthy habits when attending events or activities. The [healthy habits safety net quiz](#) explains why they work. Determining when and where to use extra measures is also important. The [activity](#) and [community](#) safety net risk assessments can help with that. Staying up to date with your [vaccinations](#) will also help protect yourself and people at higher risk of severe illness. It is also important for organizations that are hosting events to consider those at higher risk and completing these risk assessments is a great way to ensure everyone's safety is considered.

How do I know who is at high-risk?

When organizing events, it is likely that at least some people who attend would be considered at a higher risk of developing severe outcomes of COVID-19. Those at a higher risk include people that are:

- Not fully vaccinated
- Younger than 5 years
- Older than 60 years
- Pregnant
- Have the following conditions:
 - Received an organ transplant
 - Undergoing cancer treatment
 - Taking immune suppressing drugs
 - Taking heart or lung disease medicine every day
 - Diagnosed with severe kidney or liver disease
 - Suffering from dementia or have had a stroke
 - Diabetic
 - Obese BMI over 40

Those at a higher risk of developing severe outcomes of COVID-19 should seek additional support through a health centre if symptomatic or are a household contact of someone who has COVID-19. Many treatments can be accessed with timely testing and diagnosis of COVID-19.

With Spring break coming up, what are the recommendations related to travelling right now?

People are still required to file SIPs when travelling into the NWT. Additional testing requirements, and structured symptom monitoring will be required until the end of all Public Health Orders which will come with the end of the Public Health Emergency.

Self-isolation for travelers returning to the NWT will no longer be required as of March 1, 2022, but the CPHO recommends having a plan for the [first 72 hours after returning to the NWT](#).

If people no longer need to self-isolate after travel what happens if they test positive for COVID-19?

The order that requires people to isolate due to contracting COVID-19 is still in place. For more information please see: [Isolation due to COVID-19](#). If people must isolate due



to contracting COVID-19 they can isolate at home in any community. This is similar to if they had the flu or other illness, except right now isolation is still required for COVID-19.

What if they can't get home to isolate due to COVID-19?

We all need to find ways to live with COVID-19. This means minimizing our own personal risk and the risk to those around us. While travelling, it is a good idea to have a plan if you need to isolate due to COVID-19 while away from home and should be prepared. If you are hosting friends or family from another community in your home, be prepared to isolate with them as household contacts if they are required to isolate while they are staying with you.

What will happen to the places where people used to self-isolate after travel in hub communities?

The COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat will discontinue contracts with hotels that were used for people to self-isolate after travel.

Can any of the requirements be reduced for people who are fully vaccinated?

Requirements are no longer in place that distinguish between people who are vaccinated or not. Vaccination remains the best safety net we have in the NWT when it comes to protecting those at risk for severe outcomes of COVID-19. As we shift to a personal, organizational, employer and community approach to living with COVID-19, vaccination efforts will continue. The vaccines available in the NWT are safe and effective.

It is important to be up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations. It is likely that booster doses will be around for a long time, similar to getting the flu shot every year. Being up to date with all your vaccines is an important way to protect yourself and those around you.

What can I do if I am not comfortable with these changes?

It is not uncommon to feel uneasy about restrictions being lifted. Various public health restrictions have been in place in the Northwest Territories for nearly two years and it may seem like changes are coming quickly when we still have many cases. Even those who are very comfortable with the elimination of gathering restrictions may find themselves wondering what choices to make when there are no longer any binding restrictions in place to follow. That is why people should keep current on CPHO recommendations and adjust to making their own decisions by doing safety net quizzes and risk assessments.

Right now COVID-19 is showing less severe outcomes in healthy individuals than we have previously experienced with other variants. Healthy individuals who get COVID-19 are very likely to recover safely at home, as they would with the flu.

It is important to remember that a Public Health Emergency must only be in place for emergency situations. We are getting to the point where living with COVID-19 is no longer considered an emergency. This requires the territorial government to reduce and eventually eliminate these restrictions using a measured step-by-step approach.



How can we be sure that once the government reduces or removes restrictions that they won't be put back in place again?

COVID-19 will continue to exist as a concern that will pose challenges to the NWT health care system. We need to maintain the ability to be emergency-ready when outbreaks occur. The GNWT is currently evaluating how to shift from a broad crisis response to a more sustainable approach after the end of the Public Health Emergency. The GNWT remains committed to the goal of protecting the health and well-being of residents while using the least restrictive measures necessary to reduce public health risk.