

# **COVID-19 Vaccination Requirement Policy FAQs for all Sault Ste. Marie YMCA Members, participants and visitors**

## **BACKGROUND**

- The policy coincides with the announcement by the Ontario government about its vaccine certificate policy.
  - As of September 22, 2021 all YMCA Health & Fitness members and visitors who are 12+ years old will be required to be fully vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine series.
  - As of October 30, 2021, this requirement will come into effect for all other program participants and visitors who are 12+ years, YMCA staff and volunteers.
- Our Y will comply with human rights laws and accommodate individuals who are legally entitled to an exemption. Accommodation could include virtual offerings, outdoor offerings or other program alternatives.
- Program participants will be asked to use the Ontario government's vaccine verification tool as the means for demonstrating proof of vaccination.
- As we work toward the September 22 deadline for H&F member and the October 30 deadline for all other program participants, all of our current health and safety protocols remain in place.

### **1. Why are we requiring vaccines for all program participants?**

The COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective against serious illness and death from COVID-19 and its variants, including the Delta variant. This requirement is aimed at ensuring that we prioritize the health and safety of our staff, volunteers, and participants. The concerning rise in the number of COVID-19 cases due to the Delta variant threatens the progress we have all made in responding to the pandemic. As we consider the vulnerable communities we serve and the presence of children in our centres – many of whom are too young to be vaccinated – we must do everything we can to ensure their health and safety. This same vaccination requirement has been put in place for all YMCA staff, volunteers and other visitors to our centres. Our policy coincides with the Ontario government's announcement of its vaccine certificate plan.

### **2. Can participants who are not vaccinated take part in our programs until the requirement comes into effect?**

Yes. As we work toward our September 22 and October 30 deadlines, we will continue to run our programs with all of our current health and safety protocols in place for each program area and in each centre. All participants have until their respective deadlines to meet the vaccination requirement. However, in the interest of safety, we strongly encourage everyone to be vaccinated as quickly as possible. Keep in mind that you have to wait 28 days between your first and second vaccination with an mRNA vaccine (i.e. Pfizer and Moderna).

### **3. Are we offering accommodations for participants who can't be vaccinated?**

Our Y will comply with human rights laws and accommodate individuals who are legally entitled to an exemption. Accommodation could include virtual offerings, outdoor offerings or other program alternatives.

**4. What vaccines will be accepted?**

All Health Canada approved COVID-19 vaccines will be accepted. This includes mRNA vaccines (ie: PfizerBioNTech and Moderna) and viral vector-based vaccines (ie: AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD and Janssen – Johnson & Johnson).

**5. I have a mix of two different vaccines. Is that okay?**

Yes.

**6. What proof will I have to provide for my vaccination?**

Participants and other visitors to our centres will be asked to use the Ontario government's vaccine verification tool as the means for demonstrating proof of vaccination. (Examples of visitors include contractors, people touring our centres, groups using our community spaces, etc.)

**7. Are there any people accessing our programs or visiting our centres who will not have to demonstrate proof of vaccination?**

Our COVID-19 vaccination requirement policy applies to all program participants and visitors who are 12+ years old. We recognize however, that there are certain groups who are not eligible for vaccination or who may not have had full access to vaccines. The following groups are exempt from the vaccine requirement:

- Children under age 12
- Elementary and High school students participating in programs as part of their school curriculum will be subject to the vaccination requirements of their respective school boards. (For example Before and After School Programs)

**8. Does this vaccine requirement apply to children?**

The vaccination requirement policy applies to everyone who is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. This includes everyone 12 years and older.

**9. My child is turning 12 years old later this year. Does this vaccine requirement apply to them?**

The YMCA will be following the requirement of local school boards for children turning 12 this year. For example, if your local school board requires children to be vaccinated within a particular timeframe of turning 12, the YMCA's expectation will be the same.

**10. Does this vaccine requirement apply to programs that are held outdoors?**

No. Participants in outdoor programs such as outdoor fitness classes are not required to provide proof of vaccination. All our current outdoor program related health and safety protocols remain in place. However, it is important to note that if you need to enter and/or walk through the H& F centre in order

to access an outdoor program after September 22 (for Health and Fitness) or October 30 (all other programs) and you are 12+ years old, you will need to provide proof of vaccination.

**11. Will I be able to continue to participate in my indoor program(s) after the deadline if I am not fully vaccinated?**

We are providing ample time to get vaccinated or to determine whether a medical or other Human Rights Code exemption would apply to you. We are committed to supporting you with information, education, and help getting access to vaccines. Once we have exhausted all options to support you, we will determine next steps if you are not fully vaccinated by the deadline.

**12. If I have a medical or other Human Rights Code exemption for the vaccine, will I be able to participate in my program(s) freely?**

Our Y will comply with human rights laws and accommodate individuals who are legally entitled to and provide proof of an exemption. We are currently exploring the accommodations we will offer to program participants. Accommodation could include virtual offerings, outdoor offerings or other program alternatives.

**13. Why don't you provide rapid testing to allow everyone who tests negative for COVID-19 in? Wouldn't that be more equitable?**

At this time, we will require proof of vaccination as of the deadline. We continue to monitor the COVID19 situation and our policies are expected to continue to evolve over time as public health guidance indicates.

**14. If you really cared about protecting children, why did you take this long to act on this new policy?**

We have been following, and sometimes exceeding, public health guidelines to protect people from COVID-19, including children. The situation has continued to evolve throughout the pandemic and our policies and procedures have continued to evolve with them. The emergence of the Delta variant and increasing vaccination rates among those eligible have contributed to our current policy. On September 1, the Ontario government announced its vaccine certificate policy – our policy aligns with it.

**15. Why are you allowing a two month window for compliance?**

Giving people that time is an important part of balancing the need to ensure those who haven't had equitable access to the vaccine in the past still have time to get it while continuing to allow them to benefit from our charity's services. Health & Fitness members must demonstrate proof of vaccination by September 22, in accordance with the Ontario government's vaccine certificate policy.

**16. Isn't the Y all about welcoming everyone? Isn't this discriminatory? Don't you care about vulnerable people anymore – that was your reason for opposing vaccinations just a few weeks ago?**

This has been a very difficult decision for us because turning anyone away is not in our DNA and we remain concerned that access to vaccinations has not been equitable. However, with more than 3/4 of eligible adults being fully vaccinated now and the government moving to a vaccine certificate, we believe that now is the time to require proof of vaccination. Many of the people we serve are children who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated and we think this decision helps protect them. Most people

can still access YMCA programs and services virtually or outdoors as they have been during provincial shut downs.

**17. Some businesses have been targeted for requiring proof of vaccination. Are you concerned that the Y could be targeted?**

We respect people's right to disagree with our decision but hope that everyone in our community understands our decision is being made with the best interests of those in our community. This includes children who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated while balancing the need to allow those who have had inequitable access to vaccines a chance to be vaccinated.

**18. If children are eligible for the vaccine in future, will you require them to vaccinated, too?**

We will comply with any changes to the Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) and or the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA).

**19. Are you aware of any other charities doing this?**

We can't speak for other charities but other YMCAs across the country and the province are also implementing vaccination requirements.

**Health & Fitness Specific Questions:**

**20. When does this requirement come into effect for Health & Fitness?**

**September 22.** For Health & Fitness members, 12+ years old, the vaccine requirement will come into effect on September 22, in keeping with the Ontario government's vaccine certificate policy.

**21. If members are required to be vaccinated by September 22, will H&F staff be fully vaccinated by that point as well?**

No. All YMCA staff and volunteers must be fully vaccinated by October 30, 2021. Until that time, they will be following all of our rigorous health and safety protocols, including masking at all times, physical distancing, etc.

**22. That's not fair. Why is the deadline different?**

The Ontario government's September 22 vaccine requirement for visitors to gyms does not include staff. The YMCA previously announced an October 30 deadline for staff and volunteers that we are working toward. We know, however that about 80% of our H&F staff are already vaccinated and we continue to follow rigorous health and safety protocols.

**23. Will I still have to wear a mask when I am working out?**

As of September 22, it is our intention to give our vaccinated H&F members the choice to work out without a mask. This decision will be evaluated based on COVID-19 data at the time. All other health and safety measures will remain in place – including mask requirements indoors while not working out.

**24. Will children and teens be required to demonstrate proof of vaccination?**

All members who are 12+ years old will be required to be fully vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine series in order to participate in our Health & Fitness indoor programming.

**25. My child is in karate/martial arts/dance/etc. Does she/he have to be vaccinated?**

Any member who is 12+ years old will be required to be fully vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine series in order to participate in our Health & Fitness indoor programming.