



**ONTARIO
ASSOCIATION
OF FIRE CHIEFS**

**ONTARIO
PROFESSIONAL
FIRE FIGHTERS
ASSOCIATION**



Friday December 31, 2021

The Honourable Sylvia Jones
Solicitor General
George Drew Building 18th Floor
25 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 1Y6

Re: Updated Ontario Public Health Measures

Dear Solicitor General Jones,

The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) and the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association (OPFFA) have reviewed the updated Public Health measures announced by the province on December 30, 2021, and while we applaud the increased actions intended to reduce the spread of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus, we wish to provide fire sector specific concerns relating to this announcement.

In addition to managing the health and safety concerns of all Ontario firefighters, Ontario's Fire Departments are additionally having to manage the ramifications related to staff who have either tested positive for COVID-19 or are in isolation due to it. Over the past ten days, some fire departments have reported that over 30% of their fire apparatuses are out of service due to staffing shortages. While these staffing shortages are not solely related to the COVID-19 pandemic, many fire departments are reporting that staffing challenges are more than double what they were prior to the spread of the Omicron variant.

The primary staffing challenge we see is related to the isolation requirements and is further exacerbated by different Public Health Units applying different isolation metrics. One group of Fire Chiefs, who met two days ago, reported that firefighters who experienced the same exposure but reside in different regions were given entirely different and inconsistent isolation instructions.

In an attempt to maintain staffing levels that do not compromise public or firefighter safety, some Fire Departments had begun implementing Rapid Antigen Testing in order to ensure no COVID positive staff enter the workplace in an effort to minimize outbreaks within Fire Departments.

While yesterday's announcement came with some positive news related to isolation periods (reducing the isolation timeframe for a fully vaccinated person to five days), the decision not to include firefighters in the essential workers eligible for testing is extremely disappointing. Firefighter workplaces are dynamic environments where individuals are placed in a communal setting for long periods of time, intermixed with responding to a variety of emergencies where they engage members of the public in less than ideal circumstances. Despite the diligent use of personal protective equipment, and adherence to protective measures, the nature of firefighting work places these individuals at increased risk to COVID-19.



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The O AFC and the OPFFA are formally requesting that these newly released COVID-19 measures be updated to include the fire service as essential workers and support access to rapid testing (as part of workplace screening to minimize outbreaks) and PCR testing.

Additionally, the challenge of inconsistent application of isolation measures amongst local Health Units continues to be an issue and consideration to addressing this should be part of the next revision.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions. We appreciate the opportunity to work with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Grimwood".

Deputy Chief Rob Grimwood
O AFC President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carmen Santoro".

Carmen Santoro
OPFFA President

Cc: Jon Pegg, Fire Marshal