

TORONTO BATH REMODELING

Electrical & Lighting

GFCI outlets, exhaust fans, vanity lights, pot lights, heated floor electrical, and all bathroom electrical requirements and ESA inspection

19 Expert Answers from Bathroom IQ

torontobathremodeling.com/construction-brain

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Can I install a smart dimmer switch for my bathroom vanity lights, and do they work with GFCI-protected circuits?

Yes, you can install a smart dimmer switch for bathroom vanity lights, and they do work with GFCI-protected circuits. However, there are specific requirements for bathroom electrical work in Ontario that you need to understand before proceeding.

Smart dimmers are compatible with GFCI protection — the GFCI outlet or breaker protects against ground faults (electrical current leaking to ground), while the dimmer controls the light intensity. These are separate functions that work together without interference. Your vanity lights can be on a GFCI-protected circuit and still be controlled by a smart dimmer switch.

Ontario Building Code requires GFCI protection for all bathroom electrical outlets, but lighting circuits have different requirements. Vanity lighting circuits are not required to be GFCI-protected under the Ontario Electrical Safety Code, though many electricians install GFCI breakers for all bathroom circuits as an extra safety measure. If your vanity lights are currently controlled by a standard switch and working properly, adding a smart dimmer is straightforward.

Key considerations for GTA bathroom installations include ensuring the smart dimmer is rated for the total wattage of your vanity lights. LED vanity lights (the standard in modern GTA bathroom renovations) typically draw 8-15 watts per bulb, so a 4-bulb vanity fixture uses 32-60 watts total. Most smart dimmers handle 150-600 watts, making them suitable for typical bathroom vanity lighting loads.

Smart dimmer compatibility depends on your bulb type. LED bulbs require dimmers specifically rated for LED loads — using a standard incandescent dimmer with LEDs causes flickering, buzzing, and shortened bulb life. Popular smart dimmer brands like Lutron Caseta, Leviton Decora, and TP-Link Kasa all make LED-compatible models that work well in GTA bathroom applications.

Installation requirements vary by complexity. If you're replacing an existing dimmer switch with a smart dimmer of the same type (single-pole), this is often a straightforward swap — turn off the breaker, remove the old switch, connect the new smart dimmer to the same wires (line, load, neutral if required, ground), and restore power. However, if you're replacing a standard on/off switch with a smart dimmer, or if the existing switch box lacks a neutral wire, the installation becomes more complex.

Many smart dimmers require a neutral wire to power their wireless connectivity and digital displays. Older Toronto homes (pre-1970s) and some switch boxes in post-war GTA homes may not have neutral wires run to switch locations. If your switch box only has a hot wire and a switched leg (no white neutral wire), you'll need either

a smart dimmer that doesn't require neutral (fewer options, higher cost) or have an electrician run new cable to provide neutral.

Bathroom moisture considerations are important for smart switches. While the switch itself is typically outside the wet area (vanity lights are usually controlled by a switch near the bathroom entrance), ensure the smart dimmer is rated for humid environments. Most quality smart dimmers handle normal bathroom humidity without issues, but avoid installing them in locations where they could be directly exposed to shower steam.

WiFi connectivity in bathrooms can be challenging in some GTA homes, especially older houses with plaster walls or condos with concrete construction. Test your WiFi signal strength at the switch location before purchasing a WiFi-based smart dimmer. If signal is weak, consider a smart dimmer that uses a hub system (like Lutron Caseta with its bridge) rather than direct WiFi connection.

When to hire a professional: If you're comfortable with basic electrical work, have confirmed your switch box has the required wires (hot, switched leg, neutral, ground), and the existing switch controls only the vanity lights, this can be a DIY project. However, hire a licensed electrician if you need to run new cable for neutral wire, if you're unsure about wire identification, if the switch controls multiple circuits, or if you need to add GFCI protection to the lighting circuit. All electrical work in Ontario requires ESA inspection if new circuits or significant modifications are involved, though simple switch replacement typically doesn't require permits.

Smart dimmer features that work well in bathroom applications include scheduling (automatically dim lights for nighttime use), voice control integration, and smartphone control for adjusting lighting without touching switches with wet hands. Many GTA homeowners appreciate being able to set vanity lights to 30% brightness for nighttime use and full brightness for morning routines.

Q2

What are the Ontario Electrical Safety Code rules for installing a light fixture directly above a bathtub?

Installing a light fixture directly above a bathtub is prohibited by the Ontario Electrical Safety Code — no electrical fixtures are allowed in the zone directly above the bathtub rim and extending 3 feet (0.9 metres) horizontally from the tub edge.

The **Ontario Electrical Safety Code establishes specific zones around bathtubs and showers** where electrical fixtures are restricted or prohibited entirely. Zone 0 covers the interior of the tub or shower enclosure itself. Zone 1 extends from the floor to 2.25 metres (7.4 feet) above the tub rim and horizontally to the outer edge of the tub or

shower base. Zone 2 extends an additional 0.6 metres (2 feet) horizontally beyond Zone 1 and up to 2.25 metres high. **No light fixtures, switches, or outlets are permitted in Zones 0 or 1** — this means you cannot install a light fixture directly above the bathtub area.

For bathroom lighting above or near tubs, fixtures must be located outside Zone 1 — at least 3 feet horizontally from the tub edge and below the 2.25-metre height limit, or higher than 2.25 metres above the floor if closer to the tub. **All bathroom light fixtures must be rated for wet or damp locations** and must be connected to a GFCI-protected circuit. Recessed pot lights are the most common choice for bathroom ceiling lighting because they provide good illumination while meeting code requirements when properly positioned.

In GTA bathroom renovations, the most common lighting solution is to install recessed LED pot lights in the general bathroom ceiling area (outside the tub zone) combined with vanity lighting and possibly a separate exhaust fan with integrated light. For bathtub task lighting, consider wall-mounted sconces positioned outside Zone 1 or track lighting on the ceiling outside the restricted zone. **Many Toronto homeowners want dramatic lighting over freestanding soaker tubs** — this requires careful planning to position fixtures outside the electrical code zones while still providing adequate illumination.

Condo bathroom renovations have additional considerations — the building's electrical panel capacity, existing circuit availability, and potential need for electrical permit approvals through both the City of Toronto and the condominium corporation. Some older GTA condos have limited electrical capacity in bathroom areas, requiring circuit modifications to support new lighting loads.

Always hire a licensed electrician for bathroom lighting installation — the combination of electricity and water creates serious safety risks, and all bathroom electrical work requires ESA (Electrical Safety Authority) inspection before being concealed behind drywall. The electrician will verify proper GFCI protection, appropriate fixture ratings, and code-compliant positioning relative to water sources. Attempting DIY electrical work in bathrooms violates Ontario electrical code and creates liability issues with insurance and home sales.

For bathroom lighting design in the GTA market, plan for multiple light sources rather than relying on a single overhead fixture. Vanity lighting (36-48 inches above the counter), general ambient lighting (recessed ceiling fixtures outside tub zones), and accent lighting create a more functional and attractive bathroom environment than trying to position one fixture to do everything.

Need help finding a licensed electrician for your bathroom renovation? Toronto Bath Remodeling can match you with electrical professionals through the Toronto Construction Network.

Q3

How many GFCI outlets are required in a bathroom according to the Ontario Electrical Safety Code?

All receptacles (outlets) in a bathroom must have GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) protection according to the Ontario Electrical Safety Code — there is no minimum number specified, but every single outlet in the bathroom must be GFCI-protected. The code doesn't mandate how many outlets you must install, but it absolutely requires that any outlet present in a bathroom is protected.

This is one of the most important safety requirements in any GTA bathroom renovation, and it's non-negotiable. GFCI protection detects imbalances in electrical current — as small as 5 milliamps — and shuts off power within milliseconds, preventing electrocution in the wet bathroom environment. Given that bathrooms combine water, electricity, and bare skin, this protection literally saves lives.

What the Code Actually Requires

The Ontario Electrical Safety Code (OESC), which incorporates the Canadian Electrical Code with Ontario-specific amendments, requires **GFCI protection for all receptacles installed within 1.5 metres of a sink, bathtub, or shower**. In practice, since bathrooms are compact spaces — especially the typical 5x8-foot bathrooms found throughout Toronto's post-war housing stock and GTA condos — this means every outlet in the room requires GFCI protection.

GFCI protection can be provided in two ways: a **GFCI receptacle** (the outlet with the test and reset buttons built in) installed at each location, or a **GFCI circuit breaker** in your electrical panel that protects the entire circuit. Both methods are code-compliant. Many GTA electricians prefer GFCI breakers for bathroom circuits because they protect the entire circuit including wiring, not just the individual outlet, and they eliminate the need for test/reset buttons at each receptacle location.

How Many Outlets Should You Plan For?

While the code doesn't specify a minimum number, **practical bathroom design in the GTA typically calls for 2–4 outlets** depending on the bathroom size and layout. At minimum, plan for one duplex outlet adjacent to the vanity for hair dryers, electric shavers, electric toothbrushes, and other grooming appliances. For a double vanity — common in master ensuites across Vaughan, Oakville, Markham, and Richmond Hill — install an outlet on each side.

If you're installing a bidet seat (increasingly popular in GTA bathroom renovations), you'll need a dedicated outlet behind or beside the toilet. Electronic bidet seats from brands like TOTO and Brondell require a standard 120V, 15-amp GFCI-protected outlet within cord reach of the toilet — typically within 3–4 feet. Plan this outlet location during the rough-in phase, as adding it after the walls are finished is far more expensive.

For heated towel bars, plug-in vanity mirrors, or other bathroom appliances, additional outlets may be warranted. Your electrician can advise on circuit capacity — the OESC requires bathroom receptacle circuits to be **dedicated 20-amp circuits** that do not serve any other room in the house.

Existing Bathrooms — Are You Protected?

If your GTA home was built before the mid-1970s, there's a strong possibility that your bathroom outlets are not GFCI-protected, as this requirement was introduced later. While the code doesn't retroactively require upgrades to existing outlets, **a bathroom renovation that includes any electrical work triggers the requirement to bring the entire bathroom's electrical up to current code.** This is one of the most important safety upgrades in any bathroom renovation.

A licensed electrician can install GFCI protection on existing bathroom circuits for **\$150–\$400** — a small investment for a critical safety feature. All electrical work in Ontario must be performed by a licensed electrician and inspected by the **Electrical Safety Authority (ESA)** before being concealed behind walls.

During your bathroom renovation, ensure your contractor coordinates electrical rough-in and ESA inspection timing with the overall project schedule. Find local bathroom renovation contractors through the Toronto Construction Network to ensure your electrical work is done safely and to code.

Do I need an ESA inspection for the electrical work in my bathroom renovation?

Yes — any new or modified electrical work in a bathroom renovation in Ontario requires an ESA (Electrical Safety Authority) inspection. This is a legal requirement under the Ontario Electrical Safety Code, and it applies whether you're adding a single GFCI outlet or rewiring the entire bathroom.

The ESA is Ontario's independent regulatory authority responsible for electrical safety. They administer the Ontario Electrical Safety Code, issue electrical permits (called Notifications of Work), and inspect electrical installations across the province. For GTA homeowners doing bathroom renovations, the ESA inspection is a mandatory step that your licensed electrician should coordinate as part of their scope of work.

What Triggers an ESA Inspection

In a bathroom renovation context, virtually any electrical work beyond replacing a light bulb or swapping a cover plate requires an ESA notification and inspection. Common bathroom electrical work that triggers the requirement includes installing or replacing **GFCI outlets**, adding new outlets (such as behind the toilet for a bidet seat), installing or replacing an **exhaust fan**, adding or modifying **vanity lighting**, installing **recessed pot lights**, wiring a **heated floor system**, adding a **dedicated circuit** for bathroom receptacles, and any work that involves opening walls to access or modify wiring.

If your renovation is purely cosmetic — new paint, new vanity in the same location, new mirror, new hardware — with no electrical modifications, then no ESA inspection is needed. But in practice, most GTA bathroom renovations involve at least some electrical changes.

How the Process Works

Your licensed electrician files an **electronic Notification of Work** with the ESA before beginning the electrical installation. This notification serves as the electrical permit and generates a confirmation number. The cost is typically **\$100–\$300** depending on the scope of work, and your electrician includes this in their quote.

Once the rough-in electrical work is complete — new wiring run through studs, junction boxes installed, circuits connected at the panel — your electrician requests an ESA inspection. The inspector examines the work **before walls are closed up with drywall**, verifying proper wire sizing, circuit protection, GFCI placement, box fill calculations, and compliance with the Ontario Electrical Safety Code.

This timing is critical for your renovation schedule. The electrical rough-in inspection must happen **after plumbing rough-in is complete but before drywall installation**. In a typical GTA bathroom renovation timeline, this falls around week 2–3 of the project. Delays in scheduling the ESA inspection can hold up the entire renovation, so

experienced GTA bathroom contractors build this inspection window into their project schedule.

What Happens If You Skip It

Skipping the ESA inspection creates several serious problems. **Insurance implications** are the most immediate concern — if an electrical fire or incident occurs in your home due to uninspected electrical work, your home insurance company may deny the claim. **Resale complications** arise when a buyer's home inspector identifies unpermitted electrical work, which can derail a sale or require costly remediation. The City of Toronto's building department can also require you to **open finished walls** for retroactive inspection, meaning your new tile and drywall may need to come down.

More fundamentally, the inspection exists because bathroom electrical work involves circuits operating in a **wet environment** where the consequences of improper installation are severe. Improperly wired GFCI circuits, missing bonding connections, incorrect wire sizing for heated floor systems, and exhaust fans wired without proper circuit protection are all safety hazards that an ESA inspection catches.

Hiring the Right Electrician

In Ontario, only a **Licensed Electrical Contractor (LEC)** can legally perform electrical work and file ESA notifications. When your bathroom contractor brings in an electrician, verify that they are a registered LEC with the ESA — you can check their licence status on the ESA website. The electrician's licence number should appear on the Notification of Work.

A good GTA bathroom contractor will coordinate the ESA inspection seamlessly within the project timeline so it doesn't cause delays. Need help finding a professional bathroom renovator? Toronto Bath Remodeling can match you for free.

Q5

What's the best lighting layout for a bathroom vanity to avoid shadows on the face?

The best vanity lighting layout to eliminate facial shadows is side-mounted sconces or vertical light bars installed at eye level on each side of the mirror, ideally centred at approximately 60–66 inches from the finished floor. This cross-lighting approach illuminates both sides of the face evenly and virtually eliminates the harsh shadows that overhead-only lighting creates.

This is one of the most overlooked details in GTA bathroom renovations, yet it has a bigger impact on daily satisfaction than almost any other fixture choice. A beautifully tiled shower and a stunning vanity are wasted if the lighting makes you look tired every morning. Getting the vanity lighting right during your renovation — when walls are open and wiring is accessible — is far easier and cheaper than retrofitting later.

Why Overhead Lighting Alone Fails

A single overhead light or recessed pot light above the vanity casts downward shadows under the eyes, nose, and chin. This is the most common vanity lighting mistake in GTA bathrooms, partly because pot lights are easy to install and partly because many homeowners don't think about vanity lighting as a separate consideration from general bathroom illumination. Overhead lighting is excellent for general room illumination but terrible for grooming tasks.

The solution is **layered lighting** — combining task lighting at the vanity with ambient lighting for the overall room.

The Ideal Vanity Lighting Setup

Side-mounted sconces positioned on each side of the mirror are the gold standard. Mount them so the centre of the light source is at **60–66 inches above the finished floor** — roughly eye level for most adults. This positions the light source to illuminate both sides of the face simultaneously, wrapping light evenly across facial contours. For a single vanity with a 24–36 inch mirror, the sconces should be mounted **2–4 inches to each side of the mirror edge**.

For a **double vanity** — standard in master ensembles across Mississauga, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, and Oakville — you have two options. Ideally, install three sconces: one on each outer side of the mirror and one between the two sink areas. If wall space is limited (common with a large single mirror spanning both sinks), two sconces at the outer edges work well, supplemented by a linear light bar or overhead fixture centred above.

Vertical light bars (18–24 inches tall) are a practical alternative to individual sconces, especially in compact GTA condo bathrooms where wall space beside the mirror is limited. They provide the same cross-lighting effect with a more contemporary look and are easier to install — single junction box per side versus mounting individual sconces.

Colour Temperature Matters

Choose bulbs in the **3000K–3500K range** (warm to neutral white) for vanity lighting. This range renders skin tones accurately without the clinical harshness of cool white (4000K+) or the overly warm cast of incandescent-style bulbs (2700K). LED bulbs are the standard in GTA bathroom renovations — they produce minimal heat (important in a small, enclosed bathroom), last 15,000–25,000 hours, and are available in every colour temperature.

For the most accurate colour rendering — important for applying makeup — look for bulbs with a **CRI (Colour Rendering Index) of 90 or higher**. Standard LEDs typically have a CRI of 80–85, which is adequate but not ideal for grooming tasks.

Combining Task and Ambient Lighting

A well-lit GTA bathroom typically has **three lighting layers**: vanity task lighting (side sconces or light bars), general ambient lighting (recessed pot lights on a separate switch, typically 4-inch IC-rated fixtures), and accent lighting if desired (LED strip under a floating vanity, backlit mirror, or shower niche light). Each layer should be on its own switch for flexibility — your electrician can plan the circuitry during the rough-in phase.

All bathroom lighting circuits require an **electrical permit and ESA inspection** in Ontario. A dimmer on the vanity circuit is a worthwhile upgrade — bright for morning grooming, low for a relaxing evening bath. Ensure the dimmer is rated for LED bulbs, as not all dimmers are compatible. Browse bathroom renovation professionals in your area through the Toronto Construction Network directory at torontoconstructionnetwork.com/directory?category=bathroom-renovations.

Q6

Can I install a chandelier or pendant light over a freestanding bathtub, and what are the clearance rules?

Yes, you can install a chandelier or pendant light over a freestanding bathtub in Ontario, but it must meet strict clearance requirements defined by the Canadian Electrical Code (adopted in the Ontario Electrical Safety Code) — the bottom of the fixture must be a minimum of 2.5 metres (approximately 8 feet 2 inches) above the highest water level of the tub.

This is an increasingly popular design choice in GTA master ensuite renovations, particularly in newer homes across Vaughan, Oakville, Richmond Hill, and King City where ceiling heights of 9–10 feet provide ample clearance. A dramatic pendant or chandelier centred over a freestanding soaker tub creates a stunning focal point — but the electrical code requirements are strict, and the installation must be done correctly for both safety and compliance.

Understanding the Clearance Zones

The Ontario Electrical Safety Code divides the bathroom into zones based on proximity to water sources, and the rules for light fixtures depend on which zone they fall in. For a bathtub, the critical measurement is the **vertical**

clearance from the highest water level (the tub rim or overflow) to the lowest point of the light fixture.

The minimum **2.5-metre (8 feet 2 inches) clearance** from the highest water level to the bottom of the fixture is the key requirement. In a bathroom with a standard 8-foot ceiling, a freestanding tub with a rim height of approximately 22–24 inches leaves only about 5 feet 8 inches to 6 feet of clearance — well below the 2.5-metre requirement. **This means pendant lights and chandeliers over bathtubs are generally not feasible in rooms with standard 8-foot ceilings.**

For a 9-foot ceiling, you have approximately 6 feet 10 inches of clearance from a typical tub rim — still below the 2.5-metre requirement in most configurations. A **10-foot ceiling** is typically the minimum practical ceiling height that allows a pendant or chandelier installation over a freestanding tub while meeting the clearance requirement.

Fixture Requirements

Beyond clearance, the light fixture itself must be **rated for damp locations** at minimum. While the fixture is above the splash zone if clearance requirements are met, bathroom humidity and steam mean a dry-location-only fixture will deteriorate quickly. Look for fixtures rated "**Suitable for Damp Locations**" — this rating is indicated on the fixture's electrical listing label (CSA or cUL marked).

The fixture must be connected to a **GFCI-protected circuit** if it falls within the defined zone around the tub, which your electrician will determine based on the specific geometry. The junction box in the ceiling must be properly rated for the fixture weight — chandeliers can be heavy, and the box must be secured to structural framing, not just drywall.

Practical Considerations for GTA Homes

In older Toronto homes — pre-war houses in the Annex, Rosedale, High Park, and Forest Hill often have generous ceiling heights of 9–10 feet on the main floor. If your master bathroom is on the main floor of one of these homes, a pendant over the tub may be feasible. Upper floors in these homes typically have lower ceilings (8–8.5 feet), making the installation difficult or impossible.

In GTA condos, ceiling heights are typically 8–9 feet, and the concrete ceiling slab adds complexity to any fixture installation. A pendant over a tub in a condo bathroom is rarely feasible given the clearance constraints and the structural limitations of anchoring to a concrete ceiling.

Alternatives If Clearance Is Insufficient

If your ceiling height doesn't permit a pendant or chandelier, several alternatives create a similar dramatic effect. A **flush-mount or semi-flush decorative fixture** rated for damp locations can be mounted directly to the ceiling above the tub — these don't extend low enough to violate clearance rules. **Recessed pot lights** (IC-rated, vapour-

sealed for bathroom use) on a dimmer create beautiful ambient light over the tub area. A **backlit ceiling feature** or **LED cove lighting** around the tub area provides dramatic ambiance without any fixture hanging below the ceiling plane.

All bathroom lighting installations require an **electrical permit and ESA inspection** in Ontario. Your licensed electrician will verify clearance measurements and fixture ratings before installation. This is not a DIY project — the combination of electrical work, water proximity, and code compliance requires professional installation. Need help finding a professional bathroom renovator? Toronto Bath Remodeling can match you for free.

How do I wire a bathroom exhaust fan and light on separate switches?

Wiring a bathroom exhaust fan and light on separate switches requires running a 3-wire cable (14/3 or 12/3 NMD90) from a double-gang switch box to the fan/light unit — but in Ontario, this is work that must be done by a licensed electrician with an ESA inspection. While the concept is straightforward, bathroom electrical work involves wet-location safety requirements that make it a professional-only job under the Ontario Electrical Safety Code.

That said, understanding how it works helps you communicate with your electrician, plan your renovation, and make informed decisions about your bathroom's electrical layout.

Why Separate Switches Matter

Having the exhaust fan and light on separate switches is far superior to the single-switch setup found in many older GTA bathrooms. When fan and light are on the same switch, the fan only runs when the light is on — meaning homeowners often turn off both to save energy or avoid fan noise, leaving the bathroom unventilated. In Toronto's humid summers and during long, steamy showers year-round, this leads to persistent moisture buildup, peeling paint, and mould growth — particularly in interior bathrooms without windows, which are common in GTA condos and many Toronto homes.

Separate switches let you run the fan independently, including after you've finished showering and turned off the light. Even better, many GTA homeowners and electricians now opt for a **humidity-sensing switch** for the fan — a smart switch (such as the Lutron Maestro MS-OPS5MH) that automatically turns the fan on when humidity rises and off when it normalizes. This eliminates the reliance on the homeowner remembering to run the fan.

How the Wiring Works

The basic concept uses a **3-wire cable** (which actually contains four conductors: black, red, white, and bare ground) between the switch box and the fan unit. The **black wire** carries switched power from one switch to the fan motor. The **red wire** carries switched power from the second switch to the light. The **white wire** is the shared neutral return, and the **bare copper wire** is the ground. Both switches share a common hot feed from the circuit breaker, and the fan unit has separate connections for the motor and light.

The switch box needs to be a **double-gang box** to accommodate two switches side by side. If your existing bathroom has a single-gang box, your electrician will need to enlarge the opening or install a new double-gang box — a straightforward task when walls are open during a renovation but more involved if the walls are already finished.

Circuit Requirements

The Ontario Electrical Safety Code requires that bathroom circuits be properly sized for the load. A bathroom exhaust fan typically draws **0.5–1.5 amps**, and bathroom lighting draws **1–3 amps** depending on the fixtures. The combined load is well within the capacity of a **15-amp circuit**, but your electrician will verify the total circuit load including any other devices on the same circuit.

If your bathroom renovation includes a **heated floor system**, that requires its own **dedicated circuit** (typically 15 or 20 amp depending on the mat size) with a GFCI breaker — it cannot share a circuit with the fan or lighting. Similarly, bathroom receptacle outlets in Ontario must be on a **dedicated 20-amp circuit** separate from the lighting circuit.

The Right Time to Do This

During a bathroom renovation is the perfect time to upgrade from a single-switch fan/light combo to separate switches. When the walls are open for tile work, plumbing, and waterproofing, running the 3-wire cable from the switch location to the fan location is relatively simple and inexpensive — typically **\$200–\$400 in additional electrical labour** beyond what you'd pay for a standard fan installation.

If you're not doing a full renovation, an electrician can sometimes fish the cable through existing walls without opening them up, though this depends on the wall construction and accessibility. In GTA homes with finished basements below, accessing the bathroom wiring from below may be feasible.

Fan Sizing While You're At It

Since you're upgrading the switching, it's worth ensuring your fan is properly sized. The Ontario Building Code requires mechanical ventilation in all bathrooms, with a minimum capacity of **50 CFM** for a standard bathroom. Size the fan at **1 CFM per square foot of floor area**, with a minimum of 50 CFM. For bathrooms with soaker tubs or steam showers, 80–110 CFM is recommended. Quality fans from Panasonic, Broan, or Delta operate at low noise levels (0.5–1.5 sones) and won't discourage daily use.

All bathroom electrical work in Ontario requires an **electrical permit and ESA inspection**. Your licensed electrician will handle the permit filing and coordinate the inspection during your renovation timeline. Find local bathroom renovation contractors through the Toronto Construction Network to ensure your bathroom electrical work is done safely and to code.

Are LED recessed pot lights safe to use in a bathroom ceiling near the shower?

Yes, LED recessed pot lights are safe to use in a bathroom ceiling near or directly above a shower — provided they carry the correct moisture rating for the installation zone. This is one of the most common lighting questions we hear from GTA homeowners planning bathroom renovations, and the answer comes down to understanding IC ratings and damp/wet location ratings under the Ontario Electrical Safety Code.

Every recessed pot light is assigned a location rating by the manufacturer. **Damp-rated fixtures** are suitable for bathroom ceilings in areas where moisture is present but water does not directly contact the fixture — typically the general bathroom ceiling area outside the shower zone. **Wet-rated fixtures** are required for any pot light installed directly above a shower or tub, where steam, splashing water, and condensation can make direct contact with the housing. In Toronto's humid climate — especially during summer months when indoor humidity compounds bathroom moisture — using the correct rating is not optional. A damp-rated fixture installed directly over a shower will eventually corrode, trap moisture inside the housing, and create a potential electrical hazard.

Choosing the Right Fixture

Look for pot lights that are both **IC-rated** (insulation contact, meaning they can be safely installed where ceiling insulation touches the housing) and **wet-rated** for above-shower installations. Most major brands available through GTA electrical suppliers offer LED pot lights in 4-inch and 6-inch sizes with integrated LED modules that are sealed against moisture intrusion. Expect to pay **\$25–\$75 per fixture** for quality wet-rated LED pot lights, with installation running **\$100–\$200 per fixture** by a licensed electrician including the electrical connection and any ceiling modifications.

For a standard GTA bathroom (approximately 5x8 feet), **three to four 4-inch LED pot lights** at 3000K–3500K colour temperature provide excellent general illumination. In larger ensuites, five to six fixtures spaced evenly across the ceiling create balanced, shadow-free lighting. LED pot lights draw very little power — typically 9–14 watts each — so multiple fixtures can usually share a single 15-amp circuit with the exhaust fan, though your electrician will confirm the circuit loading.

Ontario Code and ESA Requirements

All new pot light installations in a bathroom require an **electrical permit and ESA (Electrical Safety Authority) inspection** in Ontario. The ESA inspector will verify that fixtures above the shower are wet-rated, that all connections are properly made, and that the circuit includes GFCI protection as required. Your licensed electrician should arrange the ESA inspection as part of their scope of work — this is not something you schedule separately.

One important consideration in older Toronto homes — particularly the post-war bungalows common across Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke — is ceiling depth. Recessed pot lights require adequate clearance above

the ceiling drywall for the housing. In homes with shallow ceiling joists or limited attic access above the bathroom, slim-profile LED pot lights (as thin as 1/2 inch) that mount flush to the ceiling surface are an excellent alternative. These retrofit-style fixtures require only a small hole in the ceiling and connect to a standard junction box.

DIY vs. Professional

This is strictly a licensed-electrician job in Ontario. Installing recessed pot lights involves cutting ceiling openings, running new wiring, making electrical connections in a wet environment, and ensuring code compliance for moisture ratings and GFCI protection. The cost of professional installation — typically **\$400–\$1,200 for a complete bathroom pot light layout** including fixtures, wiring, switches, and ESA inspection — is a small investment compared to the safety risk and code violation consequences of DIY electrical work in a bathroom.

Q9

What electrical work requires a licensed electrician versus what I can do myself in Ontario?

In Ontario, virtually all electrical work in a bathroom requires a licensed electrician, an electrical permit, and an ESA (Electrical Safety Authority) inspection. The line between what a homeowner can legally do and what requires a professional is much stricter than most GTA homeowners realize, and bathrooms are the most regulated rooms in the house because of the combination of water and electricity.

What Homeowners CAN Do

The list of permissible DIY electrical tasks in a bathroom is very short. You can **replace a light switch with a new switch of the same type** (single-pole for single-pole, dimmer for dimmer) without a permit, as long as you turn off the breaker and understand basic wiring. You can **replace an existing light fixture with a new fixture** — swapping out a vanity light bar or ceiling fixture — provided the new fixture connects to the same junction box and wiring without any modifications. You can also **replace a GFCI outlet with a new GFCI outlet** in the same location, using the existing wiring and box.

Even these simple replacements come with an important caution: if the existing wiring is outdated (knob-and-tube in pre-war Toronto homes, or aluminum wiring common in 1960s–1970s GTA homes), the replacement itself may reveal conditions that require professional assessment. If you open a junction box and find aluminum wiring, knob-and-tube, or wiring that looks damaged or improperly connected, stop and call a licensed electrician.

What REQUIRES a Licensed Electrician

Adding a new electrical circuit of any kind — for a heated floor, an exhaust fan with a heater, a towel warmer, a bidet seat, or additional pot lights — requires a licensed electrician, a permit from the local municipality, and an ESA inspection. **Running new wiring** through walls, ceilings, or floors requires a professional. **Adding a new outlet or relocating an existing outlet** requires a permit and inspection. **Installing a new exhaust fan** where none existed, or upgrading from a basic fan to a fan-heater-light combo unit, requires professional installation.

In a typical GTA bathroom renovation, the electrical scope includes **new GFCI-protected outlets** (often adding a second outlet or relocating outlets for a new vanity layout), **exhaust fan installation or upgrade**, **vanity lighting** (new fixture, possibly relocated or additional fixtures), **pot light installation**, and potentially **heated floor wiring** and a **bidet seat outlet**. All of this work requires permits and ESA inspection before being concealed behind drywall or tile.

Why This Matters for Your Renovation

The practical impact for GTA homeowners is straightforward: **budget \$1,500–\$4,000 for electrical work** in a standard bathroom renovation, depending on the scope. A basic electrical package (new exhaust fan, new vanity light, two GFCI outlets, pot lights) runs approximately \$1,500–\$2,500 including permits and ESA inspection. Adding heated floor wiring adds \$800–\$1,500 for the electrical installation alone (on top of the heating mat cost). A bidet seat outlet adds \$200–\$400.

Always confirm that your electrician is licensed with the ESA and carries WSIB (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board) coverage. Request their ESA/ECRA licence number and verify it. In the GTA, licensed electrician rates run **\$75–\$120 per hour**, though most bathroom electrical work is quoted as a flat rate for the complete scope. Get the electrical quote early in your renovation planning — it affects the project timeline because wiring must be roughed in before drywall and tile, and the ESA inspection must happen before walls are closed up.

How do heated mirrors work, and do they need a dedicated electrical circuit?

Heated mirrors — also called **anti-fog or defogger mirrors** — use a thin heating element bonded to the back of the mirror glass that warms the surface just enough to prevent condensation from forming after hot showers. They are increasingly popular in GTA bathroom renovations, especially in homes where the bathroom mirror fogs up heavily during Toronto's humid summer months or after long hot showers in winter.

The technology is straightforward. A low-wattage heating pad (typically **40–80 watts** for a standard vanity mirror) is adhered to the back of the mirror glass. When activated, it raises the mirror surface temperature a few degrees above the dew point, preventing moisture from condensing on the glass. Most heated mirrors available through GTA suppliers use a simple on/off switch — some are hardwired to the bathroom light switch or exhaust fan switch so the defogger activates automatically when you turn on the lights or fan. Higher-end models include a separate dedicated switch or a timer that runs the defogger for 15–30 minutes after activation.

Regarding whether a heated mirror needs its own dedicated circuit — **in most cases, no**. A standard heated mirror draws only 40–80 watts, which is comparable to a single incandescent light bulb. This is a very small electrical load that can typically share an existing bathroom circuit with the vanity lights, exhaust fan, and GFCI outlet without approaching the circuit's capacity. A standard 15-amp, 120-volt bathroom circuit can handle 1,800 watts; your mirror defogger, vanity light, and exhaust fan together rarely exceed 300–400 watts combined.

However, **the installation itself still requires a licensed electrician in Ontario**. Even though the power draw is modest, hardwiring a heated mirror involves making electrical connections inside the wall, potentially running new wiring from a switch or junction box to the mirror location, and ensuring the connection meets Ontario Electrical Safety Code requirements. An electrical permit and ESA inspection are required for new wiring. If your heated mirror is a plug-in model (some are), it simply plugs into an existing GFCI-protected bathroom outlet, which a homeowner can do without an electrician.

Cost and Options in the GTA

Heated mirrors range widely in price depending on features. A **basic heated mirror** (LED-lit perimeter with built-in defogger) runs **\$200–\$600** at GTA bathroom suppliers. **Smart mirrors** with integrated LED lighting, defogger, touch controls, Bluetooth speakers, and colour temperature adjustment run **\$500–\$2,000+**. Installation by a licensed electrician adds **\$150–\$400** depending on whether new wiring needs to be run or the mirror can connect to existing wiring at the mirror location.

For GTA homeowners doing a full bathroom renovation, the most cost-effective approach is to plan the heated mirror wiring during the electrical rough-in stage — your electrician can run a dedicated wire to the mirror location

and connect it to the vanity light switch or a separate switch at minimal additional cost. Retrofitting a hardwired heated mirror into a finished bathroom is more expensive because the electrician needs to fish wire through closed walls.

One practical consideration for Toronto condo bathrooms: many condo bathrooms have a single electrical box behind the existing mirror/medicine cabinet location. A skilled electrician can often tap into this existing box to power a heated mirror without running new wire, keeping the installation simple and affordable. Confirm the existing circuit capacity with your electrician before adding any load.

Q11

Can I put a regular light switch inside the bathroom, or does it need to be a certain distance from the shower?

Yes, you can put a regular light switch inside a bathroom in Ontario, but it must be located outside the shower and bathtub zones as defined by the Ontario Electrical Safety Code. There is no blanket prohibition on switches inside bathrooms — the rules are about proximity to water sources, not about whether the switch is in the bathroom at all.

The key rule under the Canadian Electrical Code (which Ontario adopts) is that **switches must not be installed within reach of a person standing in a bathtub or shower.** Practically, this means the switch must be located so that someone standing in the tub or shower cannot reach it. The general guideline is a minimum of **1 metre (approximately 39 inches) from the edge of the bathtub or shower enclosure.** Most GTA bathroom layouts naturally satisfy this requirement — the light switch is typically installed on the wall beside the bathroom door, which is well away from the tub/shower area.

Common GTA Bathroom Layouts

In the standard **5x8-foot bathroom** found in thousands of post-war Toronto homes across Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke, and the inner suburbs, the light switch is almost always located on the wall immediately inside or outside the bathroom door. This position is typically 4–6 feet from the tub/shower, well within code compliance. The switch controls the vanity light, overhead light, and/or exhaust fan — sometimes with a single toggle, sometimes with a multi-gang switch plate (two or three switches side by side for separate control of lights, fan, and heated floor).

In **GTA condo bathrooms**, space is often tighter, and the switch location is constrained by the unit layout. Most condo builders install the bathroom switch just outside the bathroom door in the hallway. During a condo bathroom

renovation, you can relocate the switch inside the bathroom as long as it maintains proper distance from the shower/tub. Your electrician will confirm the appropriate placement based on your specific layout.

For **larger ensuite and master bathrooms** common in newer Vaughan, Markham, Richmond Hill, and Brampton homes, you may have switches in multiple locations — one by the door for general lighting and fan, another near the vanity for vanity-specific lighting, and possibly a third for a water closet (toilet compartment) light. All of these are perfectly acceptable as long as none are within reach of the shower or tub.

Special Switch Types

Several switch upgrades are worth considering during a GTA bathroom renovation. **Dimmer switches** for vanity and overhead lighting let you adjust brightness — useful for nighttime bathroom visits without blinding yourself.

Timer switches for exhaust fans are excellent — they let you set the fan to run for 20–60 minutes after you leave the bathroom, clearing all the moisture without leaving the fan running indefinitely. **Humidity-sensing switches** automatically activate the exhaust fan when bathroom humidity rises above a set threshold — particularly valuable in Toronto's humid summer months when bathroom moisture problems are most acute.

All switch installations and relocations require a **licensed electrician, electrical permit, and ESA inspection** in Ontario. The cost to install or relocate a bathroom switch is typically **\$100–\$250 per switch location**, including the device, wiring, and connection. A multi-gang switch plate (controlling lights, fan, and heated floor separately) is a worthwhile investment at **\$200–\$400 installed** for the convenience and control it provides.

Q12

What wattage or colour temperature is best for bathroom vanity lighting — warm or cool white?

For bathroom vanity lighting in GTA homes, the sweet spot is 3000K–3500K (warm white to neutral white), which provides accurate colour rendering for grooming tasks without the harsh clinical feel of cool white.

This colour temperature range closely mimics natural daylight and flatters skin tones — important for a space where you apply makeup, shave, and assess your appearance daily.

Colour temperature is measured in Kelvin (K), and the number tells you where the light falls on the warm-to-cool spectrum. **2700K** is a warm, yellowish tone — cozy and relaxing but too warm for accurate colour rendering at the vanity. **3000K** is warm white — the most popular choice for GTA bathroom vanity lighting because it balances warmth with clarity. **3500K** is neutral white — slightly cooler, excellent for task lighting, and the preferred choice for homeowners who want precise colour accuracy. **4000K and above** enters cool white territory — too blue-toned for

most residential bathrooms, though some homeowners prefer it for a clean, modern aesthetic.

CRI Matters More Than Most People Realize

Beyond colour temperature, pay attention to the **CRI (Colour Rendering Index)** of your vanity light bulbs or fixture. CRI measures how accurately the light source renders colours compared to natural sunlight (which has a CRI of 100). For bathroom vanity lighting, **choose fixtures or bulbs with a CRI of 90 or higher**. A high-CRI light at 3000K will render skin tones, makeup colours, and clothing colours accurately, while a low-CRI light at the same colour temperature will make everything look slightly washed out or off-colour. Most quality LED vanity fixtures from GTA lighting suppliers list the CRI on the packaging — look for "90 CRI" or "90+ CRI."

Brightness and Fixture Placement

For vanity lighting brightness, aim for **150–200 lumens per linear foot of vanity** as a general guideline. A 48-inch double vanity needs approximately 600–800 total lumens from the vanity light fixtures. A 24-inch single vanity needs 300–400 lumens. These are rough guidelines — your perception of brightness also depends on wall colour, mirror size, and whether you have supplemental overhead lighting.

Fixture placement matters enormously for flattering, shadow-free illumination. The ideal setup is **vanity sconces mounted on either side of the mirror at approximately eye level** (roughly 60–66 inches from the floor to the centre of the fixture). This cross-lighting eliminates the harsh shadows under the eyes, nose, and chin that a single overhead fixture creates. If side-mounted sconces are not possible — common in smaller GTA condo bathrooms where the mirror extends close to the side walls — a **horizontal light bar mounted above the mirror** is the next best option. Mount it 75–80 inches from the floor, and choose a fixture with a diffused lens or shade rather than exposed bulbs to minimize glare.

Practical Recommendations for GTA Homeowners

For most Toronto bathroom renovations, here is the practical approach: select LED vanity fixtures in **3000K with 90+ CRI**, sized to provide adequate lumens for your vanity width. Budget **\$100–\$500 for the vanity light fixture** depending on style and finish, plus **\$100–\$200 for installation** by a licensed electrician if wiring modifications are needed. If you are simply swapping an existing vanity light for a new one using the same junction box, this is one of the few electrical tasks a handy homeowner can do without an electrician — turn off the breaker, disconnect the old fixture, connect the new one to the same wiring, and restore power.

Do I need a dedicated circuit for a bathroom exhaust fan with a built-in heater?

Yes, a bathroom exhaust fan with a built-in heater almost always requires a dedicated electrical circuit.

Unlike a standard exhaust fan that draws only 30–80 watts, a fan-heater combo unit draws **1,000–1,500 watts** (some models up to 2,000 watts) when the heater is operating. This is a significant electrical load that cannot safely share a circuit with other bathroom fixtures.

A standard bathroom circuit in most GTA homes is a 15-amp, 120-volt circuit with a maximum capacity of 1,800 watts. A fan-heater combo drawing 1,500 watts would consume over 80% of that circuit's capacity on its own — leaving almost no room for the vanity lights, GFCI outlets, and other devices sharing the same circuit. Running the heater on an overloaded circuit will trip the breaker repeatedly, which is both annoying and a sign that the circuit is undersized for the load. The Ontario Electrical Safety Code and the Canadian Electrical Code require that circuits not be loaded beyond 80% of their rated capacity for continuous loads.

Your electrician will typically install a **dedicated 20-amp circuit** from the electrical panel to the fan-heater unit. This provides 2,400 watts of capacity at 120 volts — more than enough for even the highest-wattage fan-heater combos with comfortable headroom. The circuit must include **GFCI protection**, either at the breaker panel (a GFCI breaker) or at the first outlet on the circuit, as required for all bathroom electrical circuits in Ontario.

Installation Considerations for GTA Homes

The practical challenge in many Toronto homes is running the new dedicated circuit from the electrical panel to the bathroom ceiling. In **older Toronto homes** — the post-war bungalows, two-storeys, and split-levels common across the GTA — the electrical panel may be in the basement, and running a new circuit to a main-floor or second-floor bathroom means fishing wire through walls and ceilings. This is manageable for a licensed electrician but adds labour time and cost compared to a simple fan swap.

In **GTA condos**, adding a dedicated circuit can be more complicated. Condo electrical panels have limited space for new breakers, and running new wiring through concrete ceilings and walls requires different techniques than wood-frame houses. Discuss this with your electrician early in the renovation planning process — if your condo panel is full, a sub-panel or tandem breaker may be needed.

Cost and Product Selection

Fan-heater combo units range from **\$150–\$500** for the unit itself, depending on features. Basic models offer a fan and radiant heater with separate switches. Mid-range models add a built-in light. Premium models from manufacturers like Panasonic and Broan include a fan, heater, LED light, and night light with a multi-function wall

switch or wireless remote control.

Installation cost for a fan-heater combo with a new dedicated circuit runs **\$500–\$1,200** by a licensed GTA electrician, including the new circuit from the panel, GFCI protection, switch installation, and ESA inspection. If you are replacing an existing fan with a fan-heater combo and a dedicated circuit already exists (or can be easily extended), the cost drops to **\$200–\$500** for the swap.

This is an especially worthwhile upgrade for GTA bathrooms without in-floor heating. A ceiling-mounted heater warms the bathroom quickly on cold Toronto winter mornings — stepping out of the shower into a heated bathroom is a significant comfort upgrade. The heater also helps dry the bathroom faster after showers, reducing moisture-related issues like peeling paint and mould growth. An **electrical permit and ESA inspection** are required for the new circuit installation.

Q14

How do I add undercabinet lighting to a bathroom vanity?

Adding undercabinet lighting to a bathroom vanity is one of the most impactful small upgrades in a GTA bathroom renovation — it creates a subtle ambient glow, illuminates the countertop for task visibility, and adds a modern, layered lighting effect that elevates the entire room. The most common approach uses LED strip lights or slim LED puck lights mounted to the underside of the vanity cabinet or upper medicine cabinet.

The easiest and most affordable option is a **plug-in LED light bar or LED strip light** that adheres to the underside of the vanity cabinet with 3M adhesive tape. These kits are available at GTA building supply stores for **\$20–\$80** and plug directly into an existing GFCI-protected bathroom outlet. No electrician needed, no permit required — you peel the adhesive backing, stick the strip to the underside of the cabinet, plug it in, and you are done. Many kits include an inline dimmer switch or touch sensor. For a cleaner look, route the cord along the back of the vanity and down to the outlet behind or beside the cabinet so the cord is not visible.

For a more polished, permanent installation, **hardwired LED undercabinet lights** are the professional-grade approach. These are slim LED fixtures (typically 1/2 to 3/4 inch thick) that mount under the cabinet and connect to a switch-controlled circuit inside the wall. The wiring is completely hidden — no visible cords, no plugs. This approach requires a **licensed electrician** to run wiring from the switch location to the fixture location, connect the LED driver (transformer), and ensure proper GFCI protection. Cost for a hardwired undercabinet light installation runs **\$200–\$500** including the fixture, wiring, switch, and labour.

Choosing the Right Light

For undercabinet vanity lighting, match the colour temperature to your primary vanity light — typically **3000K (warm white)** for a cohesive look. If your vanity light is 3500K, use 3500K undercabinet lights as well. Mismatched colour temperatures (for example, a warm vanity light with cool undercabinet lighting) create an unpleasant visual clash.

Brightness should be modest — undercabinet lighting is accent and task lighting, not primary illumination. **150–300 lumens** for a 36–48 inch vanity is plenty. If you are using LED strips, look for strips rated at **8–12 lumens per foot** for a gentle glow, or **15–20 lumens per foot** if you want more functional task lighting on the countertop. A dimmer is highly recommended so you can adjust intensity — dim for a nightlight effect, brighter for task lighting.

Practical Tips for GTA Bathrooms

In **floating vanity** installations — increasingly popular in modern GTA bathroom renovations — undercabinet lighting creates a dramatic floating effect by illuminating the floor beneath the vanity. This is achieved with the same LED strip approach, but the strip is mounted along the bottom edge of the floating vanity facing downward. The result is a ribbon of light between the vanity and the floor that makes the vanity appear to hover. If you are planning a floating vanity as part of a bathroom renovation, ask your contractor to include the LED strip wiring in the rough-in stage — it is much easier to wire during construction than to retrofit later.

For **medicine cabinet undercabinet lighting**, the same LED strip or puck light approach works well. Mounting lights under a recessed or surface-mounted medicine cabinet illuminates the vanity countertop and sink area from above, complementing the vanity light fixtures on either side of the mirror. This layered lighting approach — overhead pot lights, side vanity sconces, and undercabinet accent lights — creates the kind of flexible, multi-level bathroom lighting that GTA homeowners increasingly expect in a modern renovation.

Q15

Is it worth installing a smart bathroom mirror with built-in LED lighting and defogger?

A smart bathroom mirror with built-in LED lighting and defogger is absolutely worth considering for a GTA bathroom renovation — it combines three functional upgrades (vanity lighting, anti-fog, and modern aesthetics) into a single fixture, often at a lower total cost than purchasing those elements separately.

These mirrors have become one of the most requested upgrades in Toronto bathroom renovations over the past few years, and for good reason.

A quality smart mirror integrates **perimeter LED lighting** (providing even, shadow-reducing illumination around the mirror surface), a **built-in defogger pad** (keeping the mirror clear after hot showers), and often additional features

like **touch-activated dimming, colour temperature adjustment** (switching between warm and cool light), a **digital clock or temperature display**, and in premium models, **Bluetooth speakers** for music or podcasts. The LED lighting in these mirrors typically offers excellent colour rendering (CRI 90+) at adjustable colour temperatures from 3000K to 6000K, making them highly functional for grooming.

Cost Comparison

Here is the math that makes smart mirrors appealing. Purchasing the components separately — a quality frameless mirror (\$100–\$300), a vanity light fixture (\$150–\$400), and a retrofit defogger pad (\$50–\$150) plus installation labour — totals **\$500–\$1,200** when you include electrician fees for wiring the separate components. A comparable **smart mirror with integrated LED and defogger** costs **\$300–\$1,200** for the unit itself, plus **\$150–\$400** for hardwired installation by a licensed electrician. The total is often comparable or even less than the separate-component approach, with a much cleaner finished look — no separate light fixture above the mirror, no visible defogger wiring, just a single sleek unit.

For GTA homeowners doing a full bathroom renovation, the smart mirror is most cost-effective when planned from the start. Your electrician runs a single connection to the mirror location during the rough-in stage, and the mirror installs on the finished wall as one of the final steps. Retrofitting a hardwired smart mirror into an existing bathroom is slightly more expensive because the electrician needs to fish wire to the mirror location through finished walls.

What to Look For

Not all smart mirrors are created equal. For the GTA market, prioritize these features: **CRI 90+ LED lighting** for accurate colour rendering, **adjustable colour temperature** (3000K–5000K range covers warm through neutral), **touch-activated controls** rather than external switches for a clean look, and **adequate lumen output** (look for at least 2,500–4,000 lumens from the integrated LEDs for functional vanity lighting, not just ambient glow).

Size the mirror to your vanity — a **36x28 inch or 48x28 inch** smart mirror fits most GTA bathroom vanities. For double vanities, a **60x28 inch or 72x30 inch** model provides proper coverage. Measure carefully before ordering, especially in condo bathrooms where the mirror often needs to fit between a side wall and a medicine cabinet or between two side walls.

Reliability and Longevity

The main concern homeowners raise is long-term reliability — LEDs and electronics in a humid bathroom environment. Quality smart mirrors from established manufacturers are rated for **50,000+ hours of LED life** (roughly 17 years at 8 hours per day) and use sealed, moisture-resistant electronics designed for bathroom conditions. Budget mirrors from unknown brands may not have the same moisture protection, and failures typically manifest as LED sections dying, defogger pads delaminating, or touch controls becoming unresponsive. Stick with

reputable brands available through GTA bathroom and lighting suppliers, and confirm the warranty covers the LED and defogger components specifically.

Installation requires a **licensed electrician** for hardwired models — an electrical permit and ESA inspection apply to any new wiring in Ontario. Plug-in smart mirrors (which connect to a standard GFCI outlet) are a simpler option that a homeowner can install without an electrician, though the visible cord is less aesthetically clean.

What are the electrical requirements for an in-floor radiant heating system in a bathroom?

An electric in-floor radiant heating system in a bathroom requires a dedicated electrical circuit, a GFCI-protected connection, a wall-mounted thermostat with floor sensor, and installation by a licensed electrician with an ESA inspection — all non-negotiable requirements under Ontario's electrical code. This is one of the most popular upgrades in GTA bathroom renovations, and for good reason: stepping onto a warm tile floor during a Toronto winter morning transforms the bathroom experience.

The heating element itself is either a **pre-made mat** (heating cable woven into a mesh that rolls out over the subfloor) or **loose cable** (individual heating cable that the installer routes in a serpentine pattern with controlled spacing). Mats are the standard choice for rectangular bathroom floors — they come in fixed widths (typically 12, 18, or 24 inches) and roll out quickly. Loose cable is better for irregularly shaped floors, around toilet flanges, and in small or oddly shaped GTA condo bathrooms where a standard mat does not fit the space.

Circuit and Electrical Specifications

Most residential bathroom heated floors in the GTA operate on **120 volts** for areas up to approximately 150 square feet, which covers the vast majority of GTA bathrooms. Larger bathrooms and master ensembles exceeding 150 square feet may use **240-volt systems** for greater efficiency. The system requires a **dedicated circuit** — typically a **15-amp or 20-amp circuit** depending on the floor area and wattage. A standard electric radiant floor mat draws approximately **12 watts per square foot**. For a typical GTA bathroom floor of 40 square feet (deducting the area under the vanity, toilet, and tub where heating mats are not installed), the total draw is approximately 480 watts — well within a dedicated 15-amp circuit.

The circuit **must be GFCI-protected**, either with a GFCI breaker at the panel or through the thermostat (most modern heated floor thermostats include built-in GFCI protection with a test/reset button). The thermostat mounts on the wall — typically in the same location as the light switch or in a multi-gang box alongside other bathroom switches — and includes a **floor-temperature sensor** (a small probe embedded in the thinset between the heating mat and the tile) that monitors actual floor temperature and cycles the system to maintain the set temperature.

Installation Sequence

The timing of heated floor installation within a bathroom renovation is critical and requires coordination between trades. The sequence is: **subfloor preparation ? electrical rough-in (circuit from panel to thermostat location, thermostat box installation, conduit to floor) ? heating mat installation and testing ? floor sensor installation ? thinset over the mat ? tile installation**. The heating mat must be tested with a multimeter (ohm

reading) before thinset is applied, after thinset is applied, and after tile is installed — three separate tests to verify the cable was not damaged at any stage.

Cost Breakdown for GTA Bathrooms

For a typical GTA bathroom (approximately 35–50 square feet of heated area), expect these costs:

- **Heating mat/cable:** \$300–\$700 depending on brand (Schluter Ditra-Heat, Nuheat, SunTouch, and WarmlyYours are common brands available through GTA tile and flooring suppliers)
- **Thermostat with floor sensor:** \$100–\$300 (programmable models with WiFi connectivity run \$200–\$300)
- **Electrical installation** (dedicated circuit, thermostat wiring, GFCI protection, ESA inspection): \$500–\$1,200
- **Total electrical and material cost:** \$900–\$2,200, on top of the tile installation cost

The heating mat is typically installed by the tile installer as part of the floor preparation, with the electrician handling all wiring connections, thermostat installation, and the ESA inspection. Both trades need to coordinate timing — the electrician rough-in happens first, the tile installer lays the mat and applies thinset, and the electrician returns to make final connections and test after tile is complete.

All heated floor electrical work requires a licensed electrician, an electrical permit, and an ESA inspection in Ontario. The mat installation itself can be done by a tile installer or general contractor, but the electrical connections are strictly the domain of a licensed electrician.

Q17

Can I install a towel warmer in my bathroom — does it need its own circuit?

Yes, you can absolutely install a towel warmer in your GTA bathroom, and whether it needs a dedicated circuit depends on the type — plug-in electric models do not require a dedicated circuit, while hardwired models may or may not, depending on wattage and your existing circuit capacity. Towel warmers have become a popular bathroom upgrade across Toronto and the GTA, adding everyday luxury and helping towels dry faster in the humid bathroom environment — which also reduces musty odours and mould growth on damp towels.

There are two main types of electric towel warmers (we will focus on electric since hydronic towel warmers tied to your home's heating system are a much larger project). **Plug-in towel warmers** come with a standard electrical cord and plug directly into an existing GFCI-protected bathroom outlet. **Hardwired towel warmers** connect directly to the electrical system inside the wall, with no visible cord or plug.

Plug-In Towel Warmers

This is the simplest option and the one most GTA homeowners choose for a retrofit installation (adding a towel warmer to an existing bathroom without doing a full renovation). A plug-in towel warmer draws **60–150 watts** — roughly the same as a single incandescent light bulb. It plugs into any existing GFCI-protected bathroom outlet and does not require a dedicated circuit, an electrician, or a permit. You can install it yourself by mounting the wall brackets (usually 4 screws into wall studs or drywall anchors) and plugging it in.

The trade-off is aesthetics — there is a visible power cord running from the towel warmer down to the outlet. In a well-planned installation, the outlet is positioned directly below the towel warmer so the cord runs straight down along the wall and is partially hidden by hanging towels. Expect to pay **\$150–\$500** for a quality plug-in towel warmer depending on size, finish (brushed nickel, polished chrome, and matte black are the most popular finishes in GTA bathrooms), and number of bars.

Hardwired Towel Warmers

For a cleaner look with no visible cord, a hardwired towel warmer connects directly to the electrical system behind the wall. The electrical connection is hidden inside the wall, and the unit is controlled by a wall switch (often a timer switch that lets you set the warmer to run for 1–4 hours and then shut off automatically). This approach requires a **licensed electrician**, an **electrical permit**, and an **ESA inspection** in Ontario.

Whether a hardwired towel warmer needs its own dedicated circuit depends on its wattage and the existing circuit load. A standard hardwired towel warmer draws **60–150 watts** — a very modest load. If your bathroom circuit has adequate capacity (which it usually does, since LED lighting and modern exhaust fans draw very little power), the towel warmer can share the existing circuit. However, if your bathroom already has a heated floor, a fan-heater combo, a bidet seat, and multiple other electrical loads, your electrician may recommend a dedicated circuit to avoid overloading. Larger towel warmers (freestanding radiator-style units with many bars) can draw **300–800 watts** and will likely require a dedicated circuit.

Installation cost for a hardwired towel warmer runs **\$200–\$500** for the electrical work, on top of the cost of the unit itself. If a new circuit is needed, add **\$300–\$600** for running the circuit from the panel.

Practical Considerations

Placement matters — mount the towel warmer on a wall that is **easily accessible from the shower or tub** so you can grab a warm towel immediately after bathing. The ideal mounting height places the lowest bar at approximately **24 inches from the floor** and the top bar at approximately **48–60 inches**. Keep the unit at least **24 inches from the shower or tub edge** to comply with electrical safety clearance requirements.

A **timer switch** is highly recommended for hardwired installations — towel warmers do not need to run 24/7. Running the warmer for 1–2 hours before your morning shower warms the towels sufficiently and keeps operating

costs minimal. At 100 watts running 2 hours per day, the annual electricity cost is approximately **\$5–\$8** at Ontario hydro rates — genuinely negligible.

Q18

What's the code requirement for bathroom fan CFM rating and ducting to the exterior in Ontario?

The Ontario Building Code requires mechanical exhaust ventilation in every bathroom, with a minimum capacity of 50 CFM (cubic feet per minute) and ducting that vents directly to the exterior of the building.

This is not optional — every bathroom in Ontario must have a functioning exhaust fan that removes moist air and sends it outside, not into an attic, soffit, or wall cavity.

The 50 CFM minimum applies to a standard-sized bathroom of roughly 50 square feet or less. For larger bathrooms, the general rule is **1 CFM per square foot of floor area**. So a spacious 100-square-foot master ensuite needs at least a 100 CFM fan. If your bathroom includes a steam shower, a soaker tub, or a jetted tub, you should step up to **80–110 CFM** regardless of room size, because these fixtures produce significantly more moisture than a standard shower.

Ducting Requirements

The ductwork connecting your exhaust fan to the exterior must be **rigid or semi-rigid metal duct** — smooth-wall galvanized is ideal because it minimizes airflow resistance. Flexible vinyl or foil duct is technically permitted in some installations but creates more resistance, collects condensation, and sags over time, reducing fan performance by 20–40%. For GTA homes, where winter temperatures regularly drop to -10 to -20 degrees Celsius, **insulated duct is strongly recommended** for any run through unheated attic space. Without insulation, warm moist exhaust air condenses inside the cold duct, and that water drips back into the fan housing or ceiling — a common cause of brown stains on bathroom ceilings in older Toronto homes.

The duct must terminate at an **exterior wall cap or roof cap with a damper** that opens when the fan runs and closes when it stops, preventing cold air backdraft in winter. Duct runs should be as short and straight as possible — every 90-degree elbow adds roughly 10 feet of equivalent duct length, reducing effective CFM. The maximum recommended duct run for most residential bathroom fans is 25–30 feet equivalent length.

Common GTA Issues

In many **post-war bungalows and split-levels across Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke**, original bathroom fans were either undersized (30–40 CFM), vented into the attic, or both. During a bathroom renovation, upgrading the fan and properly routing the duct to the exterior is one of the most important improvements you can make — and it is a code requirement if you are pulling permits for the renovation.

Condo bathrooms present a different scenario. High-rise buildings have dedicated exhaust duct risers with specific connection points and inline damper requirements. You cannot simply install any fan — you need to match the fan to the building's duct system. Check with your building management before selecting a replacement fan, as some condo buildings have shared exhaust systems that restrict individual fan choices.

A quality bathroom exhaust fan in the GTA costs **\$80–\$300 for the unit** depending on CFM rating, noise level (measured in sones — look for 1.0 sone or lower for quiet operation), and features. Professional installation including proper ducting to the exterior runs **\$200–\$500**. The electrical connection requires a permit and ESA inspection if new wiring is involved.

A properly sized and ducted exhaust fan is one of the best investments in any GTA bathroom renovation — it protects your walls, ceiling, and finishes from moisture damage, prevents mould growth, and keeps your bathroom comfortable year-round. If your current fan barely moves air or vents into the attic, replacing it should be at the top of your renovation list.

How do motion-sensor or humidity-sensor exhaust fans work, and are they worth the upgrade?

Motion-sensor and humidity-sensor exhaust fans automatically turn on and off based on room activity or moisture levels, and they are absolutely worth the upgrade for most GTA bathroom renovations. These smart fans solve the biggest problem with standard exhaust fans — homeowners forgetting to turn them on or turning them off too soon, leaving moisture trapped in the bathroom.

A **motion-sensor fan** uses a passive infrared (PIR) sensor to detect movement in the bathroom. When you walk in, the fan activates automatically. It continues running for an adjustable delay period (typically 5–30 minutes) after the last detected motion, then shuts off on its own. This ensures the fan runs every time someone uses the bathroom, even for quick visits where you might not bother flipping a switch. Most motion-sensor models also have a manual override and an adjustable sensitivity setting.

A **humidity-sensor fan** takes a more targeted approach. It monitors the relative humidity in the bathroom and activates when moisture levels rise above a set threshold — usually around 60–70% relative humidity. When you take a hot shower, the humidity spike triggers the fan automatically. It keeps running until humidity drops back to the baseline level, which means it runs exactly as long as needed to clear the moisture. This is particularly valuable in Toronto's climate, where **summer humidity can push indoor levels above 60% even without a shower running**, and winter heating dries the air so the contrast between shower moisture and ambient air is dramatic.

Some premium models combine **both sensors plus a timer**, giving you triple-layered automation. Panasonic's WhisperSense and Broan's InVent series are two of the most popular options available through GTA building supply retailers.

Why They Matter in the GTA

Toronto's combination of **humid summers and cold winters** makes bathroom ventilation especially critical. In summer, a bathroom that stays humid after a shower becomes a breeding ground for mould — and GTA homes in lakefront neighbourhoods like the Beaches, Mimico, and Port Credit already deal with higher ambient humidity from Lake Ontario. In winter, warm moist air from a shower that is not properly exhausted can condense on cold exterior walls and windows, leading to water damage and mould behind finishes.

A sensor-equipped fan eliminates the human variable. It runs when needed, for as long as needed, without anyone having to remember.

Costs in the GTA market run approximately **\$150–\$400 for the fan unit** with sensor technology built in, compared to \$80–\$200 for a basic switch-operated fan. Installation cost is similar — **\$200–\$500** depending on whether existing wiring can be reused. If your renovation already includes an electrical permit and ESA inspection for other bathroom work, adding a sensor fan is minimal incremental cost.

The energy savings are modest but real — sensor fans only run when needed rather than being accidentally left on for hours. More importantly, they **protect your renovation investment** by ensuring consistent moisture management. A \$35,000 bathroom renovation with inadequate ventilation can develop mould and moisture damage within 2–3 years. A \$300 sensor fan upgrade is cheap insurance.

For most GTA bathroom renovations, a humidity-sensor fan is the best choice — it directly addresses the root problem (excess moisture) rather than using occupancy as a proxy. If your budget allows, a combination motion-and-humidity-sensor model gives you the most complete automated ventilation solution.

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