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?We need to do everything we can to avoid a very severe second wave? as York Region returns to Stage 2

We need to do everything we can to prevent a ?very severe? second wave of COVID-19 hitting the community, says Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott, as York Region settles into a ?modified Stage 2? of the Province's plan to re-open Ontario.

York Region, which has seen a significant spike of new cases of the virus over the last week, re-entered Stage 2 just after midnight on Monday. New measures will be in place for at least 28 days from October 19 at 12.01 a.m.

These new measures include limiting all social gatherings and organized public events to a maximum of 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors where physical distancing can be maintained; the prohibition of indoor food and drink service in restaurants, bars and other establishments; and the closing of indoor gyms and fitness centres, casinos and other gaming establishments; indoor movie theatres, performing arts venues; and a temporary shut-down of personal care services where face coverings must be removed, such as makeup applications and beard trimming.

York Region's return to Stage 2, albeit modified from what the community experienced this past summer, was announced by Premier Doug Ford, alongside Ms. Elliott, in Mississauga on Friday afternoon.

It was a decision both agreed was not taken lightly.

?By all accounts, the indicators are going in the wrong direction,? said Premier Ford. ?We're seeing a rapid increase in the rate of infection. With the positivity rate of 2.77 per cent above the high alert threshold of 2.5 per cent, cases per 100,000 in York are now nearly 39, well above the provincial average. Similar to what we have seen in the worst hotspots, most concerning of all, critical care admissions are reaching alarming levels.

?This was not an easy decision to make and I know this will be very, very difficult for many people to hear, but we can't allow this virus to get into our long-term care homes. We need to protect our schools and our communities. We need to keep performing vital surgeries in our hospitals. We need to stop the spread before things get worse. We need to avoid a full lockdown. We took the same decisive action with Toronto, Ottawa, Peel Region, when we saw the same alarming trends.?

The Province, he added, will ?spare no expense? to help business owners get through the duration of Stage 2.

?They have done everything right,? he said. ?They deserve our support as we do what is needed to get the spread of COVID-19 under control and I ask all the people in York Region [to] please support your local businesses, please support each other through this, because together we will get through this.?

Funds, he added, are also available for impacted business owners through a $300 million pot allocated for ?fixed costs? such as property taxes, hydro and gas bills, in addition to Federal supports.

The Premier's words were echoed by his Deputy who said health trends in York Region are ?going in the wrong direction.?

?Numbers have jumped and we need to do everything we can to avoid a very severe second wave,? said Ms. Elliott. ?This was not an easy decision and I say this as a member from York Region. However, that is how fast this pandemic is progressing through a second wave. I know that we are asking very real sacrifices of Ontarians, but this is about potentially preventing something much worse. We need to act now to keep our schools open, to protect our seniors and loved ones in long-term care, and to avoid the need for harsher measures in the future.?

In addition to the restrictions above, tour and guide services are reduced to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors, real estate

open houses are limited to 10 people indoors where physical distancing can be maintained. In-person teaching and instruction are now limited to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors, with exemptions for schools, child care centres and universities and most colleges.

Sports teams are now once again limited to training sessions, with no games or scrimmages allowed for the duration of Stage 2.

In a joint statement following the Premier's announcement, York Region Chair Wayne Emmerson and Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Chief Medical Officer of Health, said it was not an announcement ?any of us wanted to hear? but praised the Government for taking action.

?As positive cases of COVID-19 continue to rise across the province, York Regional Council and York Region's Medical Officer of Health acknowledge the provincial government and the Chief Medical Officer of Health for taking difficult but decisive action to help stop the spread of this virus in our communities,? they said. ?While this is not the news any of us wanted to hear, it is a grim reminder the virus is still a threat to the 1.2 million people who call York Region home. It also serves as a signal we all must continue taking steps to keep each other, our families and our communities safe.

?The impacts of COVID-19 continue to take a toll on everyone, including individuals, families and businesses across York Region. It is vital we all follow the public health measures in place, including staying at home when feeling ill, maintaining physical distancing, washing your hands frequently with soap and water, limiting gatherings to those in your immediate household and wearing a face mask or covering when physical distancing is not possible. York Region will continue to work with partners in the provincial government to monitor emerging COVID-19 trends within our communities.?

By Brock Weir EditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter