

## Kurji signs off ahead of retirement as York's Medical Officer of Health

As he prepares to mark his retirement on September 30, Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, is urging all individuals who have not yet been vaccinated do so as soon as possible.

This was the final message he delivered to the community on Monday, September 30, as he delivered his weekly COVID-19 update.

While he said he was sad to be leaving his post, a decision that was announced this past summer, he is looking forward to spending more time with family and to getting back to hobbies he set aside to address the global pandemic.

"In my four decades of public health service, I have been involved in many crises, including SARS, West Nile Virus, H1N1, but none has compared to COVID-19," he said. "It has been a rollercoaster of a ride for residents, students, businesses and employees, but we should all be proud of what we have accomplished together. I know many residents have made many sacrifices to adhere to public health measures; frontline workers have endured seemingly endless shifts, and businesses and students have struggled through multiple closures. It hasn't been easy for anyone, but I have also witnessed a level of unparalleled collaboration through the pandemic. The public, all levels of government, ministries, nurse practitioners, paramedics and community partners like hospitals, physicians, school boards and media, have come together like never before to support each other in the fight against the virus.

"We have faced loss, critical hospitalization levels, PPE, ventilator and vaccine shortages, ongoing uncertainties, lockdowns and ever-changing guidelines. But together we have come out on the other side and we can see the finish line."

Although Dr. Kurji is leaving his post, he says efforts put forward by York Region Public Health, efforts which have resulted in over 80 per cent of York Region residents now fully vaccinated against the virus, will continue.

"York Region continues to increase access to vaccines through pop-up and mobile clinics at various locations across York Region. I urge those who have not been vaccinated to do so as soon as possible to protect themselves and those around them," he said. "I want to assure you recruitment for my replacement is underway and I am very confident the Regional Municipality of York has very competent individuals, especially in the public health branch, that will make my departure and transition to a new medical officer of health seamless. I have no doubt that York Region will be in good hands going forward.

"On a final note, I wish to share a heartfelt thank you with the residents of York Region, members of Regional Council, members of provincial parliament, my colleagues, and all our partners in our combined efforts against COVID-19 for their dedication, unwavering support and kindness. I will always remember and reflect on my time serving York Region fondly."

**By Brock Weir** Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter