

New COVID measures for sports facilities as vaccination rates near 90 per cent

As the number of eligible York Region residents to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 passes 86 per cent, York Region Public Health is putting forward new rules to help combat the spread of the virus in re-opened sports facilities.

Under a new letter of instruction to owners and operators of facilities where organized sports are played, everyone ages 12 and up are now required to be fully vaccinated in order to enter the facility, with exceptions for those with valid medical exemptions.

"This includes all players, coaches and officials," said Dr. Richard Gould, York Region's Acting Medical Officer of Health, in his weekly update on Monday. "Facilities must also comply with all other requirements under the Reopening of Ontario Act and its regulations that apply to the facility. This decision was made in response to current data and modelling which projects York Region could see up to 430 cases of COVID-19 per day by December 2021. This modelling also suggests 44 hospitalizations of those under the age of 19 by December 31, 2021. We also know from our data that of the 10 outbreaks related specifically to basketball tournaments or events from Saturday, February 20, 2020 to Tuesday, September 20, 2021, one in five cases were linked to York region and two thirds of the cases were under the age of 18. At a recent dance event held in York Region in August, there was a COVID-19 exposure and the resulting outbreak included 19 cases among the 111 attendees. All these cases were in dancers ranging from seven to 16 years old. Eight of those cases were in kids over 12 years of age that were not fully vaccinated.

"The current rate of infection among unvaccinated individuals 12 years of age or older is 110.3 cases per 100,000 population. In contrast, among fully vaccinated individuals, the rate is significantly lower at 12.7 cases per 100,000 population. In the past two months, almost all COVID-19 related deaths and hospitalizations occurred in individuals who were not vaccinated or partially vaccinated. Activities related to organized sports have the potential to increase COVID-19 transmission. The close contact, heavy breathing, long exposure times, crowded indoor spaces, and masks removed during physical activity all contributed to increased risk of COVID-19 transmission. Requiring more groups to be protected with COVID-19 vaccinations will help reduce this risk while maintaining opportunities for sport.

"Based on this information, decisions to require proof of vaccination from all individuals aged 12 and up entering facilities where organized sports are played and/or practiced cannot wait."

The new rules came into effect October 1 and ahead of its enactment, the Town of Aurora said they would support these efforts to reduce the spread "but they also underscored users will have time to comply with the new guidelines as the municipality will take an "education first" approach on the matter until November 1.

"These new measures will help us better protect our community and our residents," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. "We are in another wave of this pandemic and these new guidelines are needed to provide another added layer of protection and support our reopening plan to provide programs and services to residents. Out of consideration for the changing landscape for users, we're instituting a grace period until November 1 to make sure that people have time to come into compliance with the new instructions. As we have done consistently throughout this pandemic, we are striking a balance between protecting our community and respecting individual circumstances."

LOCAL STATS

As of Tuesday, October 5, Aurora has seen a total of 2,032 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the start of the global pandemic. 1,970 cases are now marked as recovered and there have been 48 fatalities.

Of the 14 active cases, 11 are attributed to local transmission, close contact or unknown exposure, 1 to schools, 1 to travel and 1 to workplace outbreak.

At press time this week, the Region was reporting an open outbreak at Highview Public School.

51.2 per cent of the new cases reported between September 27 and October 4 were among the unvaccinated eligible population.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter