

Reopening Province will depend on vaccine rates

Every dose of COVID-19 vaccine injected into an arm will bring us one step closer to re-opening Ontario, the Province announced Thursday.

Last week, the Provincial Government released its 'Roadmap to Reopen,' a three-step plan which scraps Ontario's previous colour-coded system with one entirely dependent on the number of people who get their shots.

The first steps towards re-opening were realized on Saturday with the re-opening of many outdoor amenities, such as golf courses and tennis courts, but there is still a long way to go before more sectors are able to once again open their doors.

'As a result of the strict public health measures we introduced to stop the spread of COVID-19 variants, we are seeing a steady improvement in our situation as ICU and hospital numbers begin to stabilize,' said Premier Doug Ford. 'While we must remain conscious of the continued threat the virus poses, with millions of Ontarians having received at least their first dose of vaccine we can now begin the process of a slow and cautious reopening of the Province in full consultation with our public health professionals.'

Following the reopening of outdoor amenities, the resumption of outdoor activities with smaller crowds 'where the risk of transmission is lower', coupled with opening up non-essential retail at 15 per cent capacity is Step 1 of the plan. Here, outdoor gatherings of up to 10 people will be allowed, along with outdoor dining of up to four people per table.

Step 2 will see a further expansion of outdoor activities and the resumption of limited indoor services with small numbers of people where face coverings are worn. This includes outdoor gatherings of up to 25 people, outdoor sports and leagues, personal care services where face coverings can be worn and subject to capacity limits, as well as indoor religious services and ceremonies at 15 per cent capacity.

Step 3 will see expansion of access to indoor settings 'with restrictions, including where there are larger numbers of people and face coverings can't always be worn. Activities under this umbrella include indoor sports and fitness, indoor dining, museums, galleries, libraries, casinos and bingo halls.

Getting through these steps, however, will require more Ontarians to line up to get their shots.

To reach Step One, the Province states 60 per cent of adults will need to have received at least their first dose of vaccine. The threshold to Step 2 will be 70 per cent of adults with their first dose and 20 per cent vaccinated with two doses. Step 3 will depend on 70 to 80 per cent of adults receiving their first dose and 25 per cent receiving their second.

'Based on current trends in key health indicators, including the Provincial vaccination rate, the government expects to enter Step One of the Roadmap the week of June 14, 2021,' said the Province. 'The Province will confirm closer to the expected start of Step One.'

Added Health Minister Christine Elliott: 'While we know that now is not yet the moment to reopen, Ontarians deserve to know the path forward on what will carefully reopen and when, starting with the settings we know are safest. Brighter days are ahead and we believe this Roadmap represents a path out of the pandemic and will encourage Ontarians to get vaccinated and to continue following public health advice.'

Emergency brake restrictions will remain in place as the Province assesses when Step One can be realized. Current stay-at-home orders are set to expire on June 2.

Schools will continue to operate in the remote learning model for the time being.

“Due to the stringent efforts of Ontarians following public health and workplace safety measures, we have reached the point where we can begin preparing to exit the Province-wide emergency brake and lift the stay-at-home order,” said Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. David Williams. “We must remain vigilant, however, as the fight against COVID-19 is not over and our case counts, ICU capacity and hospitalizations are still concerning. It remains critical that all Ontarians continue to follow all public health and workplace safety measures currently in place to help further reduce transmission and save lives.”

In Aurora, the response to the latest development on the path to re-opening received a mixed review from Mayor Tom Mrakas who said while lifting the restrictions on outdoor amenities was welcome, there were still questions for businesses.

“With the announcement from the Province on reopening plans, I was pleased to hear outdoor activities will be reopened as of Saturday, May 22,” said Mayor Mrakas on Thursday. “Many mayors across the Province have called for this, in addition to many experts, as it is important for everyone's mental and physical wellbeing.

“We are turning a corner when it comes to this pandemic. With the new three-step approach to reopening announced today, there will be less confusion for our businesses and residents as restrictions are lifted. While I am concerned about the length of time that it will take for some local businesses to reopen, I am supportive of re-opening our economy in a measured way that will allow our businesses to begin to ‘build back better’ while ensuring we keep everyone safe. We need to ensure that this is the last time we ever lock down. Our local businesses can't go through another lockdown.”

AURORA STATISTICS

An 82-year-old Aurora woman is the community's 47th confirmed loss to COVID-19.

She died Wednesday, May 19, at Barrie's Royal Victoria Health Centre, York Region Public Health confirmed on Friday.

She tested positive for the virus on May 9. The date she first experienced symptoms is unknown, as is her exposure.

As of Tuesday, May 25, Aurora has seen a total of 1,798 confirmed cases of COVID-19, 1,712 of which are now marked as resolved.

Of the 39 active cases, 37 are attributed to local transmission, close contact, or unknown transmission. One case is attributed to institutional outbreak and one to workplace outbreak.

677 of Aurora's cases are linked to variants of concern, 46 of which have confirmed lineage.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter