

## Restrictions eased further, but don't go far enough for restaurants: Mayor, Industry

Ontario has cautiously lifted capacity limits put in place in response to COVID-19, but the further loosening of public health restrictions does not go far enough for some sectors, say advocates.

Just in time for Thanksgiving, the Ontario Government, in consultation with the Province's Chief Medical Officer of Health, lifted a number of restrictions on capacity limits for many indoor venues, as well as outdoor settings with a capacity of less than 20,000 people.

"As we continue to see more Ontarians roll up their sleeves with over 22 million doses administered, our government is cautiously lifting capacity limits in select settings where we know proof of vaccination requirements are providing an added layer of protection to Ontarians," said Minister of Health and Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott in a statement. "The fight against COVID-19 is not over and we must all remain vigilant by continuing to follow the public health measures we know work and keep us safe, and receiving your first or second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if you haven't already done so."

The new rules allow 100 per cent capacity at concert venues, theatres and cinemas, spectator areas for sports, recreation and fitness facilities (with the exception of gyms and personal training), meeting and event spaces as long as capacity able to maintain physical distancing, along with race tracks, and audiences for film and television productions.

The Province says these settings have seen "a limited number of outbreaks" and workplace safety measures are proving effective.

"I am thankful for the continued efforts of Ontarians getting vaccinated and following public health measures and advice as we have continued to cautiously and gradually reopen the province," said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario. "However, now is not the time to let our guard down. We must all continue doing our part and continue strictly following the measures that remain in place and get as many people as we can fully vaccinated, especially as we enter the holiday season."

But left out from the list of venues and sectors benefiting from the easing of restrictions were restaurants.

This omission has led to calls for a re-think from the industry itself as well as local leaders.

"We are extremely disappointed and this is not right or fair to a sector that has been suffering from 18 months of COVID-19 hardships and devastation," said Tony Elenis, President & CEO of the Ontario Restaurant and Hotel & Motel Association (ORHMA), in a statement a day after the Province's announcement. "We were the first to close and continue to suffer with capacity limits and imposed pressure of vaccine passport verification.

"ORHMA is outraged that restaurants continue to be penalized with punitive restrictions. We know expenses have climbed in food cost, payroll, and from the whole supply chain. Bank and personal financial loans are added to your overall costs of keeping the doors open and are all waiting for the signs of positive recovery. We all know limiting restaurant capacity brings revenue limitations to support growth to the bottom line. Restaurants are truly the hardest hit."

Elenis added that the Association is hopeful a lifting of capacity limits in restaurants will happen and, in the meantime, they have received words of support from the local level.

Using the social media hashtag #letthemopen, Mayor Tom Mrakas said a statement would be coming this week on the matter further outlining the municipality's position but said, "It is disappointing that gyms and restaurants continue to be restricted with capacity limits even though they require proof of vaccination."

### LOCAL STATS

As of Tuesday, October 12, Aurora has seen a total of 2,042 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the start of the global pandemic.

1,986 cases are now marked as recovered and there have been 48 fatalities.

Of the 8 active cases, 6 are attributed to local transmission, close contact or unknown exposure, and 2 to travel.

Among the cases logged by York Region Public Health between October 5 and October 12, 50.5 per cent were among unvaccinated residents ages 12 and up who are eligible for a shot.

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