

Schools to remain closed through April 5 as Province declares State of Emergency

Publicly-funded schools across Ontario will remain closed through April 5 due to the impact of COVID-19.

The announcement was made last Thursday by Premier Doug Ford, Health Minister Christine Elliott, and Education Minister Stephen Lecce.

“The health and well-being of Ontarians is our government's number one priority. Since we first learned of COVID-19 as an emerging public health issue, Ontario has been diligently monitoring the developing situation to protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians,” said the Province in a statement. “Based on advice from Dr. David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and the experts at the COVID-19 Command Table, the Minister of Education has issued a Ministerial Order to close all publicly funded schools in Ontario for two weeks following March break, in response to the emergence in Ontario of COVID-19. This order was approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. This means that Ontario schools have been ordered to remain closed from March 14 through to April 5, 2020.

“We recognize the significant impact this decision will have on families, students, schools, as well as the broader community, but this precaution is necessary to keep people safe. Today's steps build on a number of actions our government has taken in recent days to respond to COVID-19, including moving forward with additional public health measures, which include enhanced access to screening, expanding lab-testing capacity, and implementing new initiatives to keep the public and frontline workers safe. We are further setting aside up to \$100 million in contingency funding in the upcoming 2020 budget to address challenges related to COVID-19.

“We are further mindful of those who work in other public institutions and buildings. As this situation evolves, Ontario's COVID-19 Command Table is prepared to respond quickly and effectively to any scenario and provide the government with advice on measures to keep the public and frontline workers safe. We are committed to working with partners to keep students safe and we expect to provide further information in the near future.”

Local school boards “and, indeed, students and families” are still looking for answers on how the rest of the school year will proceed.

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), previously scheduled to take place on March 31, has been put on the backburner, with the York Region District School Board seeking further direction.

“Students who require the OSSLT to graduate will be supported,” said the York Region District School Board (YRDSB). “More information regarding the OSSLT will be made in the future.”

Although we recognize the significant impact this Provincial Government decision will have on students, families and the broader school community, we appreciate the measures to keep students and families safe," added the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB).

The Boards noted they are also waiting on word on whether the school year will be extended into the summer.

In the meantime, the YRDSB has compiled a list of online resources for students and parents to continue their learning from home. Resources ranging from math to drama, can be found at www.yrdsb.ca/Students/Pages/Online-Resources.aspx. Further resources and updates from the YCDSB can be found at ycdsb.ca/covid-19.

DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY

On Tuesday, the Government of Ontario announced that it is taking decisive action by making an order declaring an emergency under s 7.0.1 (1) the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. In doing so, Ontario is using every power possible to continue to protect the health and safety of all individuals and families.

"We are facing an unprecedented time in our history," said Premier Ford. "This is a decision that was not made lightly. COVID-19 constitutes a danger of major proportions. We are taking this extraordinary measure because we must offer our full support and every power possible to help our health care sector fight the spread of COVID-19. The health and wellbeing of every Ontarian must be our number one priority."

As a result of this declaration and its associated orders, the following establishments are legally required to close immediately:

All facilities providing indoor recreational programs;

All public libraries;

All private schools as defined in the Education Act;

All licensed child care centres;

All bars and restaurants, except to the extent that such facilities provide takeout food and delivery;

All theatres including those offering live performances of music, dance, and other art forms, as well as cinemas that show movies; and

Concert venues.

Further, all organized public events of over 50 people are also prohibited, including parades and events and communal services within places of worship. These orders were approved by the Lieutenant Governor in

Council and will remain in place until March 31, 2020, at which point they will be reassessed and considered for extension, unless this order is terminated earlier.

"We are acting on the best advice of our Chief Medical Officer of Health and other leading public health officials across the province," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

"We know these measures will affect people's every day lives, but they are necessary to ensure that we can slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect our people. We're working with all partners across the system, from public health to hospitals and community care, to do everything we can to contain this virus and ensure that the system is prepared to respond to any scenario."