

## Business owners, residents concerned about lifted restrictions: Public Health

As business owners and residents alike express concerns over the lifting of all indoor capacity limits this week, York Region Public Health is urging kindness as we settle into another new normal.

Capacity limits in all indoor settings were lifted on Tuesday, March 1, along with the requirement to produce proof of vaccination in most indoor public settings.

But according to Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, rules allowing business owners to maintain the rules as they see fit has led to an extra challenge.

We will be marking two years since COVID-19 came to Ontario with school closures on March 12, 2020 and a Declaration of Emergency on March 17, and all the dramatic changes to our lives that followed, said Dr. Pakes on Monday. But this week marks a turning point that so many of us have been looking forward to.

Beginning March 1, capacity limits will be lifted in all indoor settings and proof of vaccination will no longer be required to enter indoor public settings. In alignment with this Provincial reopening, our York Region Letter of Instruction for owners and operators and supporting facilities, updated last November, will also be revoked as of March 1, 2022.

This means that proof of vaccination for players, coaches, volunteers and spectators will no longer be required to enter indoor facilities where organized sports are played or practiced. The Proof of Vaccination program has been incredibly effective in protecting these spaces and the individuals who use them, as well as making patrons feel more comfortable and protected.

Many York Region residents and businesses have expressed concern about the removal of the Proof of Vaccination program and this is understandable. Individual businesses and organizations do have the option to continue to require vaccine passports if they feel it is appropriate in their setting. We encourage all businesses and residents to be kind and respectful as we navigate this very significant change.

Over the past week, Dr. Pakes said hospital admissions due to COVID-19 have continued to decrease, but at a more modest pace. Wastewater data that previously showed a sharp decrease after the Omicron surge in the past month may now be showing signs of an increase again in the GTA.

[This is] something we did expect but something we need to monitor very closely, he said. As almost all pandemic control measures are reduced, vaccination is our best and may be our only protection against the resurgence and the need to re-institute measures. It is more important and more urgent than ever to get vaccinated. Right now, there are only two pieces of our vaccine puzzle that are lacking: our booster coverage and our five to 11 coverage. Well over 60 per cent of York Region residents in some age groups are boosted but in other groups it is somewhat lower. The COVID-19 booster dose is 95 per cent effective against hospitalization and severe illness in Ontario and this is the best protection we have against the Omicron variant.

The other group of concern is school-aged children, of which over 60 per cent have received their first dose, and most of those their second dose as well. To protect in-person learning and these children for the rest of this school year and into next fall, we need to do better.

### LOCAL STATS

As of Monday, February 28, Aurora was experiencing 20 confirmed active cases of COVID-19, according to York Region Public Health.

But, as the Region notes, this number is an under-estimate of the real number.

?With rapid transmission of Omicron and recent provincial changes in testing eligibility and case management, case counts and outbreaks reported through the COVID-19 in York Region interactive dashboard are an under-estimate of the true number of individuals with COVID-19 and outbreaks in York Region,? the Region stated at the start of January, adding case counts should be treated with caution. ?Public Health units across Ontario are prioritizing case management of high-risk individuals and settings. Workplace outbreaks are no longer reported.?

The Region is no longer reporting source of exposure for active cases.

Since the start of the global pandemic, York Region Public Health had been able to confirm 4,225 PCR-confirmed cumulative cases of COVID-19 in Aurora as of February 29. 4,144 cases are now marked as resolved. There have been 61 fatalities attributed to the virus.

89.6 per cent of Aurora residents aged 5 and up have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 87 per cent had received two doses by the start of the week.

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