

## Capacity limits in restaurants, other businesses lift as Province moves forward re-opening timelines

Capacity limits in restaurants, bars, movie theatres and more are set to be lifted this Thursday, February 17, as the Province accelerates its re-opening plan.

The new timelines were announced by the Ontario Government on Monday, citing improvements in public health indicators.

"Given how well Ontario has done in the Omicron wave, we are able to fast track our reopening plan," said Premier Doug Ford in a statement. "This is great news and a sign of just how far we've come together in our fight against the virus. While we aren't out of the woods just yet, we are moving in the right direction."

In addition to restaurants, bars and movie theatres, capacity limits will be lifted as well in areas that require proof of vaccination, including non-spectator areas of sports and recreational facilities, including gyms, casinos and other gaming establishments, and indoor areas of settings that choose to opt-in to proof of vaccination requirements.

While capacity limits in sports arenas, concert venues and theatres will not be completely lifted, they will be allowed to operate at 50 per cent capacity.

Indoor capacity limits will be set at 25 per cent in higher-risk settings where proof of vaccination is required, including night clubs, restaurants where there is dancing, and sex clubs.

Capacity limits for indoor weddings, funerals and religious services will be set on the number of people who can maintain two metres of physical distance.

"Capacity limits are removed if the location opts-in to use proof of vaccination or if the service, rite, or ceremony is occurring outdoors."

Capacity limits in other indoor public settings like grocery stores, pharmacies, retail and shopping malls will be set at the number of people who can maintain two metres of physical distance.

"Thanks to the Province's high vaccination rates and the continued sacrifices of Ontarians, we are now in a position where we can move forward in our plan earlier than anticipated," said Minister of Health and Deputy Premier Christine Elliott. "With hospitalizations and ICU admissions continuing to decline, we are committed to maintaining a gradual and cautious approach to protect our hospital capacity and ensure patients can access the care they need when they need it."

The new timeline received the support from York Region Public Health, but with a note of caution for our local hospital capacity.

"As we approach the further easing of restrictions in Ontario, while this is great news for our mental health and economy, we must remain cautious," said Dr. Richard Gould, Associate Medical Officer of Health for the Region of York, on Monday. "Omicron is highly transmissible and we must continue to follow public health guidelines. Working together we can get through this."

The COVID situation in York Region continues to improve, albeit slowly, he added.

"Our hospitals in York Region continue to have decreasing admissions, though the burden is still very high and close to the peak admissions during the third wave," he continued. "This means regular healthcare, non-COVID-19 disease and urgent care cannot be conducted as normal. The good news is that as of last week the Province announced a gradual resumption of non-urgent and non-emergent surgeries and procedures. We need to ensure that our hospitals have the capacities to resume and maintain this care. Decreasing COVID-19 hospital and ICU admissions is important so we can give better access to anyone in the healthcare system."

## FUTURE TIMELINES

This Friday, February 18, the Province will expand booster eligibility to youth between the ages of 12 and 17. Additionally, further restrictions are set to be eased effective March 1 if public health indicators and health system capacities continue to improve.

“This includes lifting capacity limits in all remaining public indoor settings,” said the Province. “Ontario will also lift proof of vaccination requirements for all settings at this time. Businesses and other settings may choose to continue to require proof of vaccination. Masking requirements will remain in place at this time, with a specific timeline to lift this measure to be communicated at a later date.

“To manage COVID-19 over the long-term, public health units can deploy local and regional responses based on local context and conditions.”

## LOCAL STATS

As of Monday, February 14, Aurora was experiencing 13 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 4,149 PCR-confirmed cumulative cases of COVID-19 in Aurora as of February 14. 4,076 cases are now marked as resolved. There have been 60 fatalities attributed to the virus.

89.3 per cent of Aurora residents aged 5 and up have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 86.3 per cent had received two doses by the start of the week.

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