

Capacity limits lifted in most settings as Ontario looks to ease restrictions by March

Capacity limits in venues where proof of vaccination is required – such as restaurants and gyms – are now lifted as the Province of Ontario looks at when further public health measures can be eased.

The limits as they pertain to restaurants and bars, indoor areas of sports and recreation facilities such as gyms, instances where personal fitness trainers are providing instruction, as well as casinos, bingo halls, and other gaming establishments were eased effective Monday, October 25.

It was the first step in what the Province presented last Friday on a longer-range roadmap for a return to normal.

“Thanks to our cautious and careful approach to reopening, we are now in a position to gradually lift all remaining public health measures over the coming months,” said Premier Doug Ford in a statement. “The plan is built for the long term. It will guide us safely through the winter and out of this pandemic, while avoiding lockdowns and ensuring we don’t lose the hard-fought gains we have made.”

Added Health Minister Christine Elliott: “Since the beginning of the pandemic, Ontario has taken a cautious approach to reopening to protect the health and safety of Ontarians. Our plan will ensure we replicate this success and take a gradual approach that will protect our health system capacity, prevent widespread closures, keep our schools open, and support the province’s economic recovery.”

The easing of restrictions that came into effect Monday was the first step in the new timeline.

All remaining public health and workplace safety measures, including the requirement for proof of vaccination and the wearing of face coverings in indoor public settings could be lifted in as soon as six months.

Timelines, however, will be phased in according to key public health and health care indicators such as the identifications of new COVID-19 variants, increases in hospitalizations, ICU capacity, and increases in transmission.

The next step on this roadmap is tentatively set for November 15, when Ontario intends to lift capacity limits in remaining higher-risk settings like restaurants with dance facilities, such as nightclubs and strip clubs.

January 17, 2022 is the tentative date to lift capacity restrictions in places where proof of vaccination is not required, pending any “concerning trends” coming out of the winter holiday and students returning to class after the winter break.

“Proof of vaccination requirements may also begin to be gradually lifted at this time, including for restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments, facilities used for sports and recreational facilities and casinos, bingo halls and other gaming establishments,” said the Province.

Come February 7, proof of vaccination requirements in high risk settings like nightclubs and strip clubs, could be lifted and, by March 28, a return to normalcy will be closer than ever.

“At this time (March 28), it is intended that remaining public health and workplace safety measures will be lifted, including wearing face coverings in indoor public settings,” said the Province. “Recommendations may be released for specific settings, if appropriate. In addition, the Provincial requirement for Proof of Vaccination will be lifted for all remaining settings, including meeting and event spaces, sporting events, concerts, theatres, cinemas, racing venues and commercial and film productions with studio audiences.”

In order to manage COVID-19 long term, the new roadmap also allows for local and regional responses to combat the virus based on

local data. Measures that could be introduced by the local health units could include reintroducing capacity limits or physical distancing requirements in certain settings ? ?in exceptional circumstances.?

?York Region welcomes the recent release of the Ontario Government's plan to safely reopen Ontario and manage COVID-19 for the long-term,? said Dr. Richard Gould, Acting Medical Officer of Health for the Region of York. ?The plan also allows for local health units to reintroduce capacity limits and other public health measures based on local data and COVID-19 case counts. While we're pleased with the Provincial announcement, residents are reminded that COVID-19 continues to be present in our community.?

LOCAL STATSAs of Tuesday, October 26, Aurora has seen a total of 2,059 cases of COVID-19, 1,999 of which are now marked as recovered.

There have been 48 fatalities.

Of the 12 active cases, 8 are related to local transmission, close contact, or unknown exposure, while 3 are attributed to school settings, and 1 is related to travel.

Between October 19 and October 26, 52.7 per cent of cases were among the unvaccinated eligible population aged 12+.

87.2 per cent of Aurora residents had received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine at the start of the week, while the number of residents with one dose stood at 89.9 per cent.