

## Capacity limits re-introduced by Province, limits on private indoor gatherings

A 50 per cent capacity, per new Provincial orders, is now in place impacting many indoor public settings.

These include restaurants, bars, and other food or drink establishments and strip clubs; personal care services; personal physical fitness trainers; retailers (including grocery stores and pharmacies); shopping malls; non-spectator areas of facilities used for sports and recreational fitness activities, such as gyms; indoor recreational amenities; indoor clubhouses at outdoor recreational amenities; tour and guide services; photography studios and services; and marinas and boating clubs.

These limits do not apply to any portion of a business or place that is being used for a wedding, a funeral or a religious service, rite or ceremony, the Government noted.

In another bid to help reduce the spread, the Government has limited the number of patrons sitting at a table to 10 people, with patrons required to remain seated in restaurants, bars and other similar settings.

Bars and restaurants are required to close by 11 p.m., with longer hours for takeout and delivery.

Dancing is not allowed except for workers or performers.

Food and drink services is prohibited at sporting events, concert venues, theatres and cinemas, casinos, bingo halls and other gaming establishments; elsewhere, the sale of alcohol will be restricted after 10 p.m. and the consumption of alcohol in businesses or settings after 11 p.m.

Additionally, for informal social gatherings, just in time for the holiday season, there will be limits on social gatherings to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors.

"This was not an easy decision to make before the holidays, but the evidence is clear that further public health measures are required to slow the spread of Omicron and prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed," said Health Minister, Deputy Premier, and Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott.

This was a sentiment shared at the start of the week by Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's Medical Office of Health.

"We know vaccination alone won't be sufficient to meet the challenge of Omicron so these measures are absolutely necessary," he said, before noting the capacity limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings over the holidays. "I know this is challenging for families who are looking forward to spending time together over the holidays. It is important we recognize that transmission occurs when there is close contact between individuals. While many have focused their attention on larger settings, expressing some incredulity at the large venues, such as sporting events with thousands of people, it's actually in these many millions of smaller gatherings at homes where the virus truly spreads.

"These are settings where people are comfortable with one another, remove their masks and spend a significant amount of time in close contact with each other. With nearly 400,000 private households in York Region, these types of gatherings will continue to contribute to rising cases of Omicron in York Region. Aim for as small a gathering as possible. Make sure everyone is vaccinated and ideally those 70 or 50 should have a booster. Make sure to actively screen everyone for symptoms, even if they are mild. Finally, if you have rapid antigen tests in your households, you may consider using these tests. There is no magic bullet. We have seen instances where COVID-19 did spread after the use of these tests, so your first layer of defence is small gatherings, distancing, and gathering outdoors."

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