

Cases show signs of decline as Ontario re-opens

As Ontario re-opens following its return to Step 2, wastewater indicators in York Region are showing signs that the recent wave of COVID-19 might be declining.

“When looking at our wastewater data, cases in York Region seem to have stabilized and are decreasing,” said Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region’s Medical Officer of Health, in his weekly update on the local situation on Monday.

But, he stressed, now is not the time to let our guard down.

Ontario on Monday moved into the first stage of its “gradual and cautious” reopening plan.

As such, most venues and businesses are now able to open at 50 per cent capacity, with no more than 500 people at larger venues.

This, said Dr. Pakes, is “good news for the business community and for our collective mental health and economic wellbeing.”

“But we must enter this new phase with eyes wide open, meaning that re-opening means increased gathering and interaction,” he said. “With hospital admissions still very high and ICU [admissions] and deaths still increasing, we must remain extremely cautious. This includes adhering to public health measures like wearing a mask [and] remaining home if ill or exposed to someone with COVID-19 symptoms.

“Most importantly, get vaccinated with your booster dose if you haven’t already.”

Recent data released at the start of the week by the Province has shown that a booster dose is 95 per cent effective in preventing hospital admissions, something Dr. Pakes said is “a substantial increase over two-dose effectiveness.”

“If you thought that perhaps you don’t need a booster, you do,” he said. “Our recent modelling shows that our booster campaign and the 50 per cent of York Region residents that have been boosted prevented a total of 60 ICU admissions and over 200 deaths prevented. Booster doses for each and every one of us is crucial.

“I know this has been challenging for all of us – people and businesses included. The beginning of the reopening plan is an encouraging sign. With additional capacity limits to be reviewed and continued as of February 21 if indicators keep moving in the right direction, this all depends on you and our booster dose campaign.

EXPANDED ELIGIBILITY

Another encouraging sign is the expansion of booster eligibility and availability in York Region.

As of this week, Pfizer is available once again available for booster doses in all of York Region’s clinics and walk-ins are now being accepted for boosters as well.

“This is a big change to make it more convenient for you to either walk in or make an appointment,” said Dr. Pakes. “For anyone who wants COVID to be over, I can’t express the urgency enough to get your booster dose by walking into any of our York Region clinics for your first, second or booster doses.

“With children being back [at] in-person learning for almost two weeks now, we need to protect the health and safety of students and keep them in schools the best way we know how: we can make sure they’re vaccinated as soon as they are eligible. The good news is over 60 per cent of children 5 – 11 are now vaccinated in York Region with one dose and 15 per cent already have their second dose. Please bring your child into any of our clinics. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has recommended a

booster dose for adolescents aged 12 ? 17, but only those with specific medical conditions or live in congregate settings, or those from high-risk or marginalized groups. I look forward to sharing the details of this long-awaited change shortly. Unfortunately, all 12 ? 17-year-olds are not yet eligible, despite us knowing that many, many parents are very enthusiastic for this change.?

LOCAL STATS

As of Monday, January 31, Aurora was grappling with 32 confirmed active cases of COVID-19, but, as York Region Public Health notes, this number is an under-estimate.

?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 4,066 cumulative cases of COVID-19 in Aurora as of January 3. 3,975 cases are now marked as resolved and there have been 59 fatalities attributed to the virus.

The latest resident lost to the virus is an 85-year-old man who succumbed on January 26 after experiencing his first symptoms on January 21 and a positive test result on January 23. He died at Southlake Regional Health Centre.

88.8 per cent of Aurora residents aged 5 and up have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 85 per cent had received two doses by the start of the week.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter