

Face masks will become mandatory in public spaces next Friday

Non-medical face masks will become mandatory in enclosed public spaces across York Region next Friday, July 17.

The decision was made by Regional Council on Thursday afternoon after a day-long remote meeting.

The temporary measure will expire November 30, unless any further measures are passed at the Regional level.

Public spaces, as defined in the Region's decision, include places of business, including malls, along with places of worship, libraries and galleries, community service agencies working with the public, event spaces, spaces such as open houses and presentation centres used for real estate purposes, common areas of hotels and short-term rental establishments, and entertainment facilities.

Exemptions will be made for those with medical conditions and for children under the age of 5.

The Region notes in the approved motion its intent is to direct owners and operators of such spaces to display York Region-approved signage and to have a policy in place that prohibits persons from entering premises of the establishment if the person is not wearing a non-medical face covering [subject to the exemptions and that] the instruction shall further specify that best efforts shall be made by operators of enclosed public spaces in good faith, to only allow entry to persons wearing a non-medical face covering and that education rather than enforcement shall be the principle objective of the instruction.

The move is in line with a recent decision by York Region Transit, effective July 2, to make mask-wearing compulsory on all transit vehicle.

Regional Council remains committed to the health and safety of everyone travelling, living and working in York Region, said York Region Chairman and CEO Wayne Emmerson following the transit-related decision. As we are re-opening and more people have come back to our transit system, it is more important than ever for everyone to play their part in keeping our families and communities safe.

Exemptions have been made for children under the age of two, those unable to wear a face covering because of a medical condition and passengers needing assistance placing or removing a face covering.

The Region's debate comes as Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Karim Kurji warned residents about an increase in cases of COVID-19 on York Region farms.

We have one large outbreak at a farm and a few cases each at several farms in York Region, said Dr. Kurji in his Monday briefing. These have been proactively identified with the help of our hospital partners, in particular Southlake Hospital. Our Public Health inspectors have been into these farms in order to give infection prevention and control advice to the farmers, as well as to ensure that the living conditions are adequate.

?We at Public Health continue to be actively involved in identifying several other outbreaks in a multitude of settings and to move in very quickly in order to control these and put out the fires before they spread.?

Cases are also on the rise, he added, amongst youth between the ages of 15 and 19.

?We don't know what exactly is causing this and we're still investigating this,? he said.

By Thursday night, Aurora was grappling with 12 active cases of COVID-19, up from single digits at the same time the previous week.

To date, Aurora has experienced 122 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 95 cases now marked resolved. 15 residents have lost their fight with the virus.

?I would like to remind you that we do need to be very vigilant,? said Dr. Kurji. ?It is so easy for this outbreak to get out of control again. Please ensure that you physically distance by two metres or more and if you're unable to physically distance then to put on a mask, particularly when you are indoors. Also, please wash your hands frequently and be vigilant for any signs or symptoms of COVID-19.?

By Brock Weir