

## Frustration shouldn't cloud measures that have been critical to re-opening, says Medical Officer of Health

Frustration shouldn't get in the way of recognizing the impact common sense measures have had in preserving our economy, says Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's Medical Officer of Health.

In his weekly update on the local fight against COVID-19, the Region's top doctor touched upon protestors who have clogged the streets of Ottawa for more than a week and, this past weekend, took their convoys to Toronto to press for an end to all COVID-19 measures.

It is important not to confuse frustration with some measures that have impacted businesses and many of the things we enjoy with the common-sense measures, such as masking and vaccination, which have saved our society and our economy, and continue to be critical to our ability to re-open, said Dr. Pakes.

There is a consensus that reopening is critical to our mental health and the social fabric of society and our economy. As we gradually reopen, many businesses in the hardest-hit sectors are the most positively impacted. We can now go to restaurants, gyms and many other settings, but we owe it to them to protect this recovery, to continue to wear masks, and adhere to measures in these settings and, of course, get your booster so this re-opening can stick.

As protests continued into this week, Dr. Pakes said the overall COVID-19 situation is improving in both York Region and across Ontario.

COVID-19 signals in the Region's wastewater data continues to show signs of decreasing very slowly, but it still remains far above any previous wave.

It is a long way down in such a high peak, but it is reassuring, he said, cautioning that the reopening will likely coincide with an increase in cases.

This increase, he added, will not be dramatic because of the 55 per cent of eligible York Region residents who have received their booster dose after being fully vaccinated, and the 88 per cent of our 12+ population with at least two doses.

Thank you to everyone for adhering to the measures and helping to lessen the impact on our acute care system, said Dr. Pakes. [On the hospital front], acute care and ICU admissions are down, but unfortunately still far too high and far too full to begin again doing the important non-COVID work we need them to do and for people to get the care they need. Though we continue to see a gradual decline in admissions, there are still approximately 2,300 patients with COVID-19 in Ontario hospitals right now. This is very close to our peak in Wave 3, but the trend is tenuous and the transition back to regular operations is still a challenge.

We all want to see the end of this pandemic and the return to normal. Many, many York Region and Ontario residents have trouble understanding why the re-opening cannot occur immediately. One only needs to look at the hospital care sector to see the answer. We have made many good decisions as individuals and as a society, leading up to one of the best, if not the best and balanced pandemic responses in the world. We need to keep it up for just a while longer and make the best decision for a return to normal that we can make: getting a booster dose. Getting your booster dose is key to preventing severe illness and hospitalization from COVID-19 as individuals and collectively.

### LOCAL STATS

The number of Aurora residents lost to COVID-19 now stands at 60, as of Monday, February 7.

The latest fatality was a 68-year-old female who died Wednesday, January 19, at Southlake Regional Health Centre, the Region

reported on Friday. She first felt symptoms on Tuesday, January 4 before testing positive on January 11. Her exposure to the virus is unknown.

By the start of the week, Aurora was grappling with 23 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 4,114 PCR-confirmed cumulative cases of COVID-19 in Aurora as of February 7. 4,031 cases are now marked as resolved and there have been 60 fatalities attributed to the virus.

89 per cent of Aurora residents aged 5 and up have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 85.7 per cent had received two doses by the start of the week.

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