

New COVID-19 rules for bars and restaurants welcomed by Region

The Province has announced new measures targeting restaurants, bars and other businesses in a bid to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The Ontario Government announced additional measures and restrictions to restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments on Friday, just days before the Province reported 700 new cases of COVID-19 over a single day, the highest this figure has been since the start of the pandemic in March.

New rules levy new restrictions to bars, restaurants, and nightclubs, among other businesses that serve food and drink, including the barring of alcohol sales after 11 p.m., the consumption of alcohol in said premises from 12 midnight until 9 a.m., and requiring establishments to close by from midnight to 5 a.m., with exceptions for delivery and takeout services.

All businesses and organizations are required to comply with all instructions handed down by Provincial health officials.

Strip clubs, which have seen at the centre of some outbreaks in the City of Toronto, were also required to close last Saturday.

“Last week, our government took immediate action to respond to a recent rise in COVID-19 case by setting new limits for certain social gatherings and organized public events across Ontario,” said Health Minister Christine Elliott. “As the numbers of cases have continued to rise, it is evident that despite the tremendous efforts of Ontarians, further action is required to prevent the spread of the virus.

“On the advice of Ontario's public health officials, we are moving forward with these measures to help keep Ontarians safe by limiting the potential for exposure in locations where the current risk of transmission is higher, and to avoid further lockdowns. Protecting the health and wellbeing of Ontarians will always remain our top priority.”

Last week's announcement also addressed concerns that have been voiced by some of the very businesses targeted in Friday's announcement: business owners and employees being tasked with enforcing COVID-related measures, including screenings before allowing patrons on-site.

The Province said it will “work with the municipal sector and other partners to encourage increased enforcement of existing businesses, facilities, workplaces, etc., to comply with all public health and workplace safety measures and restrictions in the Stage 3 regulation.”

“This past week has seen a series of important initiatives from the Provincial government,” said Dr. Fareen Karachiwalla, Associate Medical Officer of Health for the Region of York. “As of this weekend, for example, restaurants, bars and other similar establishments like nightclubs, are not allowed to sell alcohol after 11 and must be closed by midnight. We applaud this move given the risk of COVID-19 transmission in some of these environments.

“We are well aware of how even one sick person with COVID-19 attending a party-like setting, sharing drinks and being in close proximity to others can result in a large number of secondary cases. Also, the Province has now moved away from recommending testing for completely asymptomatic low-risk people without any exposures to ensure that those who need testing the most are prioritized. 60 pharmacies around Ontario now offer appointment-based testing for people who are asymptomatic but fall into a higher-risk group.”

At press time, this list of 60 pharmacies did not include an Aurora location.

“Testing for these groups or anyone who is unwell or been exposed to COVID-19, should continue to occur at assessment centres,” she continued. “Remember that testing remains a cornerstone of the response and anyone that is feeling unwell with symptoms should go for testing.”

In the weekly update from York Region Public Health, Dr. Karachiwalla said people from across all sectors and communities have a crucial role to play to help ensure these government initiatives are successful.

With a surge in cases, she noted, it is important for residents to know that the system as a whole is more prepared to deal with a second wave of the virus.

With this surge of cases, it is important to know the system as a whole is more prepared. We are more knowledgeable and we have in place many of the measures that are needed to ensure that this rise does not exceed our capacity. We do not want to see our ER and hospital beds fill up again, so both governments and individual residents have a crucial role to play in determining the shape of the curve and the fate of what the pandemic will look like this fall.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter