

Province hits pause on plan to lift remaining capacity limits

In the face of rising cases of COVID-19, the Province has hit pause on its plan to further lift capacity limits in remaining higher-risk settings.

This, the Ontario government says, is being done "out of an abundance of caution" due to current trends.

"The phased and cautious approach to Ontario's safe reopening includes ongoing monitoring and assessment of key public health and health care indicators," said the Province in a statement last week. "While Ontario's hospital and intensive care capacity remains stable and the Province continues to report one of the lowest rates of active cases in the country, certain public health trends, including the effective reproduction number and percent positivity have increased slightly over the last week.

"An increase in cases was always expected as more people move indoors due to the colder weather and as the province eased measures. However, out of an abundance of caution, existing capacity limits and physical distancing requirements for higher-risk settings where proof of vaccination is required will remain in place to ensure the province has the required time to better understand any potential impact on hospitalizations and ICU admissions."

Higher-risk settings currently paused include restaurants and bars with dance facilities, strip clubs and bathhouses.

"Throughout the pandemic our government has taken a cautious approach to reopening, ensuring our hospital capacity remains stable and the province continues to report one of the lowest rates of active cases in the country," said Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "To protect our hard-fought progress and ensure we can continue to manage COVID-19 for the long-term, more time is needed before we can take the next step forward in our reopening plan."

At the local level, there was another pause, one which has allowed youth turning 12 in 2022 who participate in outdoor organized sports a "grace period" of three months to get their COVID-19 vaccines.

This amends previously issued letters of instruction requiring people aged 12 and older to provide proof of vaccination. Effective January 1, kids who turn 12 in 2022 will have a 12-month grace period from their birthday in which they will not need to show proof of vaccination at indoor sports and recreation centres.

"This change ensures that those turning 12 years of age have sufficient time to receive two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and continue their indoor sports activities," said Dr. Richard Gould, York Region's Acting Medical Officer of Health, on Monday. "Protecting the health and wellbeing of our communities remains York Region's Number One priority as we continue to respond to the pandemic."

As facility owners will still require proof of vaccination overall, Dr. Gould urged residents to "continue to demonstrate kindness and cooperation" when asked.

"York Region continues to work with businesses and we appreciate the cooperation of residents and businesses in adhering to vaccine certificate requirements," he said. "The York Region COVID-19 enforcement task force continues to inspect for compliance and provide education to ensure proper use of masks, screening, safety plans, contact list, and most recently proof of vaccination are in place. These measures remain important in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and to protect children who are not yet able to be vaccinated.

"It is through our collective efforts that we continue to keep our communities safe. With the colder temperatures upon us bringing many indoors, it is important to remember COVID-19 remains active in our communities and spreads more easily in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation, crowded places, and close contact settings. Everyone should be mindful of symptoms you may be feeling, even if you are vaccinated. If you're experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, seek assessment and testing immediately" as soon as

symptoms start and stay home otherwise.?

Since the start of the global pandemic, Aurora has seen a total of 2,081 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of Tuesday, November 16, with 2,025 cases now marked as recovered. There have been 48 fatalities.

Of the 8 active cases, all are attributed to local transmission, close contact, or unknown exposure.

90.5 per cent of eligible Aurora residents had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by the start of the week, while those who had received two doses stood at 88.4 per cent.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter