

Public Health applauds new gathering restrictions

York Region Public Health is 'applauding' the Provincial Government's decision to impose new limits on 'unmonitored' social gatherings across Ontario as the rate of new cases of COVID-19 continues to rise.

The Province imposed new limits on these social gatherings 'including functions, parties, dinners, gatherings, barbecues or wedding receptions held in private residences, backyards, parks and other recreational spaces' Ontario-wide to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors following a recent surge in which daily cases topped 400. Previous limits announced under Stage 3 of the Province's re-opening plan were 50 people for indoor events and 100 people for outdoor events.

New limits will not apply to 'events or gatherings held in staffed businesses and facilities, such as bars, restaurants, cinemas, convention centres, banquet halls, gyms, places of worship, recreational sporting or performing arts events.'

'Over the past several days, we have seen an alarming growth in the number of COVID-19 cases in the Province,' said Premier Doug Ford in a statement. 'Clearly, the numbers are heading in the wrong direction. That's why we are taking defensive action to lower the size of unmonitored private social gatherings in every region of Ontario. We need everyone to follow the public health rules in order to protect all our citizens, especially the elderly and the vulnerable.'

Added Health Minister Christine Elliott, MPP for Newmarket-Aurora: 'We are taking further action to slow the spread and limit new cases of COVID-19 by reducing the size of private social gatherings across Ontario. This action is based on the increasing case counts that we are seeing. As we continue to closely monitor the spread of the virus, we will never hesitate to take further action to protect the health and wellbeing of all Ontarians.'

As numbers continue to rise within York Region, the local Public Health Unit heralded the implementation of new restrictions on social gatherings.

'When we look at our graphs, it appears that whilst our cases have been rising and are almost at June levels, the gradient of rising cases is lower than what we experienced in April. This tells me that some of our defences have been working and we are halting the virus' expansion,' said Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Chief Medical Officer of Health, in his weekly update on Monday. 'By continually being vigilant and practicing all those physical measures that we have been advising, we should be able to thwart the expansion of the virus.'

'Businesses have to continue to be vigilant as the numbers of workplace cases continues to be high. We have ten workplaces that have confirmed outbreaks and almost 40 workplaces with suspect outbreaks. The Province has recently enacted legislation preventing indoor social gatherings and outdoor social gatherings and public events at private dwellings not to exceed ten indoors and 25 outdoors. This has been something that we applaud as we in York Region have found that a substantial number of our cases have arisen from house parties, weddings, etc. In fact, in one instance, we had 47 cases that arose as a result of these house parties.'

The numbers of contacts per case in these situations is particularly high, added Dr. Kurji, stating these stand at approximately seven per cent.

'It is very important that we avoid crowded indoor situations and by that I would also expand to include any indoor situation that you go to. Whether it is a tourist location or whether it is a crowded business location, please extract yourselves if you find that physical distancing of two metres is not being practiced. The most important measure is physical distancing of two metres. Masks provide an additional layer of protection, so just bear in mind that if you follow these particular guidelines we should be safe.'

As schools continue to open, York Region has seen approximately 10 schools on surveillance for cases of COVID-19, although no Aurora schools at press time were part of this ten. When cases are identified within the schools, Dr. Kurji said the Public Health team moves rapidly to do assessments, which includes an examination of close contacts with each particular case, including before-

and after-school programs, buses, cohorts, and household contacts.

They also try and find an ?acquisition source? for each case to see whether they are from within the school population. Thus far, he noted, most cases have been community-acquired and they are not aware of any cases of in-school transmission.

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