

Reopening takes Step forward just in time for Canada Day

Canada Day is normally a day for some time off, but for many businesses this year, it is a time to hit the ground running.

Ontario moved to Step 2 of its Roadmap to Reopen on Wednesday, June 30.

This latest step, which was announced June 24, will allow more businesses to re-open as the number of new COVID-19 cases continue to decline.

“Because of the tireless work of our health care heroes, and the record-setting success of our vaccine rollout, we are able to move into Step Two ahead of schedule on June 30 with the support of our public health experts,” said Premier Doug Ford in a statement. “We are proceeding safely with the re-opening of our province and will continue to work around the clock until the job is done.”

Under Step 2, limited indoor services are allowed to move ahead, along with the resumption of more outdoor activities.

Outdoor social gatherings and organized public events are now limited to up to 25 people, while indoor social gatherings and organized public events will be limited to a maximum of five.

Essential and other select retail is now permitted at 50 per cent capacity, with non-essential retail limited at 25 per cent capacity. There is also a 25 per cent capacity limit on personal care services where face coverings can be worn at all times – meaning now is the time to book that elusive haircut.

Outdoor dining is now allowed with up to six people per table, while indoor religious services, including weddings and funerals, will be permitted at up to 25 per cent capacity of the designated room.

As for staying active, outdoor fitness classes will be limited to people who can maintain three metres of physical distance. Non-contact outdoor sports can proceed with no specified limit on number of people or teams participating. Outdoor sports facilities can reopen at 25 per cent capacity, as can outdoor fairs, festivals, rural exhibitions and other activities.

Outdoor concert venues, theatres and cinemas can operate at 56 per cent capacity as well.

“Due to a continued improvement in key indicators, Ontario is ready to enter Step Two of our Roadmap, allowing us to safely and gradually ease public health measures while continuing to stop the spread of COVID-19,” said Health Minister Christine Elliott. “Thank you to the Ontarians who rolled up their sleeves to help us reach this exciting milestone. Every dose administered brings us one step closer to the things we’ve missed, so please sign up to receive the vaccine when it is your turn.”

Vaccines were key in acceleration of the previously-announced timeline to get to Step 2.

The Province set the goal posts at a minimum of 70 per cent of adults receiving their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and 20 per cent of the eligible population with their second doses for at least two weeks. As of Wednesday, June 23, this rate stood at 76 per cent of eligible Ontarians receiving their first dose and 29 per cent with their second.

“Before entering Step Two, the Province also needed to see continued improvement in key public health and health care indicators, including hospitalizations, ICU occupancy and the weekly cases incidence rates,” said the Ontario Government. “After entering Step One, during the period of June 11 to 17, the Provincial case rate decreased by 24.6 per cent. As of June 22, the number of patients with COVID-19 in ICUs is 305, including 10 patients from Manitoba, as compared to 450 two weeks ago. The Province expects these positive trends to continue over the coming days before entering Step Two.”

Here in Aurora, the early arrival of Step Two was greeted with muted enthusiasm by local leaders.

"I applaud the Province's efforts in taking a cautious approach to ensure we remain safe as we continue to fully vaccinate residents and it is welcome news that the Province has just announced we are moving to Step Two," said Mayor Tom Mrakas on Thursday morning. "This will allow for personal care services to reopen with the proper protocols in place, which I have advocated for.

"However, while I am pleased with the progression, with the vaccination progress and the reduction in hospitalizations, I feel this roadmap is overly cautious. We need to be looking at moving to Step 3 as all of the Province's previously-indicated requirements have been met. Moving to Step 3 is not rushing as the entire Province has met the requirements of Step 3 and as it is as restrictive as the former 'Red Zone', this is the proper balance and cautious approach that continues to keep everyone safe while we allow our businesses to begin to recover. The data supports this opening and the time is now to make this move."

LOCAL STATS

As of Friday, June 25, Aurora has seen a total of 1,839 cases of COVID-19, 1,790 of which are now marked as recovered, and the active case count dipping to just 1.

The single active case has been attributed to local transmission, close contact or unknown exposure.

There have been 48 deaths attributed to the virus.

747 cases have been linked to variants of concern.

Figures following the weekend were not available from York Region Public Health at press time.

By Brock Weir Editor/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter