

Second lockdown came after hospitals raised alarm bells

Despite York Region's best efforts to stave off a second lockdown, residents are settling into just that as the number of new infections of COVID-19 climb and the clock ticks down to the holidays.

York Region entered its second lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic just after midnight on Monday, December 14, after the Province announced it was moving both York Region and Windsor into the Grey Zone.

"Over the last week, public health indicators in York and Windsor regions have continued to trend in the wrong direction and it is evident additional measures are needed to help limit the spread of the virus," said Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health, on December 11. "By making this difficult but necessary decision we can help to ensure that hospitals in these regions can work to provide patients with the care they need when they need it, including the performing of scheduled surgeries and other important procedures."

The move came just days after York Region hospitals, including Southlake Regional Health Centre, issued a joint statement saying they had reached a "tipping point" in handling the virus.

"We have reached a tipping point in our efforts to manage COVID-19-related volumes at our hospitals," they said. "After seeing a significant increase over the last week in the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to our hospitals, we are concerned about how this may impact access to care like scheduled surgeries for all patients across our communities."

"We are counting on our communities to help keep our staff, physicians and volunteers safe so they can continue to care for everyone who relies on us for care, for COVID-related illnesses as well as non-COVID-related illnesses and emergencies. While we have seen strong collaboration amongst health care organizations across York Region to help prepare for and manage the second wave of COVID-19 thus far, what we need now more than ever is support from our communities to be vigilant in following Public Health guidance aimed at slowing the spread."

Staff, physicians and volunteers are doing everything they can to continue providing care to patients and their families, but "the mounting pressure from COVID-19 is taking a toll on many."

"For them and for everyone, as a community, we must do better. We are asking that you always wear a mask in public and when you cannot physically distance, and avoid social gatherings. We know that the greatest potential for this virus to spread is when people interact in groups of any size, so in order to slow the spread, we must avoid these interactions. We recognize that avoiding social gatherings, especially during the holidays, is a personal sacrifice but we need to do whatever we can to help protect our entire community and maintain access to our health care services."

On Friday, this statement was cited by Minister of Health "and Newmarket-Aurora MPP "Christine Elliott when asked why only York and Windsor were moved into the Grey zone."

"If the numbers are going up in a particular area, [Dr. Williams] speaks with the local medical officer of health to obtain his or her view of this situation and whether they believe they should take stricter measures," she said. "They also take a look at the rates of hospitalization, the number of people in intensive care, the number of people on ventilators and so on. I know in certain parts of the Province, in York Region, for example, the hospitals indicated they were at the tipping point. There are a number of factors that have to be considered and that is why in this situation York was recommended to go into lockdown."

Now that lockdown has arrived, it is illegal to gather indoors with anyone you do not live with and contact must be limited to your household, staying at least two metres apart from everyone else. If you live alone, you can have close contact with only one other household.

Indoor gatherings are no longer be allowed, with outside gatherings restricted to 10 people with appropriate physical distancing.

Residents are cautioned to only go out for essential reasons like work, school, groceries, pharmacy trips, healthcare, helping vulnerable people, and exercise and physical activity.

All businesses must screen employees for COVID-19, limit capacity so guests can stay at least two metres apart, and restaurants, bars, and like establishments will be limited to take-out, drive-thru and delivery service. All indoor and outdoor service will be shut down

"The Aurora Chamber of Commerce is concerned with the safety of residents and the survival of local businesses," said Sandra Ferri, President & CEO of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. "We continue to monitor how the lockdown will be administered with regards to areas of concern, especially how large retailers who carry essential and non-essentials goods remain open for the public's shopping experience while small retailers are asked to shut down or move to a delivery/curbside pick-up model.

"The holiday season is the time when most small retailers prosper. Having that opportunity taken away from them leaves them vulnerable to an uncertain future."

Added Mayor Mrakas in a statement: "Our small businesses will be required to shut their doors to the public, offering only curbside pickup. The impact on our local businesses will be immeasurable, especially during the holiday season, so I encourage residents who are able to order takeout, shop online locally and help support our businesses."

Residents, he said, can access a directory of local businesses and help support local business through exploreaurora.ca.

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