

Step One of Ontario's new re-opening plan in effect Friday

Businesses will once again be able to re-open their doors, following a decision made by the Province on Monday to accelerate its four-step plan towards a return to normalcy.

Originally slated to take effect next Monday, Ontario is bringing Step One forward to 12.01 a.m. on Friday, June 11, following a continued downward trend in new cases of COVID-19.

"Thanks to the ongoing success of Team Ontario's vaccine rollout and the ongoing improvements in public health trends, we are able to enter Step One of the Roadmap and begin to safely and cautiously lift restrictions," said Premier Ford in a statement on Monday. "The only reason we're able to do so is because of the enormous sacrifices made by individuals, families and communities across Ontario. As we begin to enjoy the benefits of the first step in our roadmap like meeting friends on a patio or visiting your favourite local store, please do so safely by continuing to follow all public health guidelines."

So, what will be open by the end of this week?

Non-essential retail will be opened at 15 per cent capacity with no restrictions on the goods that can be sold. Essential and other selected retail will be permitted at 25 per cent capacity, again with no restrictions on the goods that can be sold.

Outdoor dining will once again be open to four people per table with exceptions for larger households, and indoor religious services, rites or ceremonies, including wedding and funeral services, will be allowed at 15 per cent capacity.

Outdoor social gatherings and organized public events will be permitted with a maximum of 10 people. Outdoor fitness classes and group personal training will be allowed for groups of up to 10, along with individual/team sport training at the same limits.

Day camps will be allowed to operate with appropriate safety guidelines in place and overnights at campgrounds and sites, including Ontario Parks can be booked again.

Although Ontario initially targeted hitting Step One on June 14, it hinged on hitting vaccine milestones: 60 per cent of adults with at least one dose of an approved COVID-19 vaccine. As of June 6, 72 per cent of Ontarians 18+ had received their first dose.

"Before entering Step One, the Province also needed to see continued improvement in key public health system indicators," said the Government of Ontario. "During the period of May 25 to 31, the Provincial case rate decreased by 35.1 per cent. As of June 6, the number of patients with COVID-19 in ICUs is 497, including 31 patients from Manitoba, as compared to 687 two weeks ago. The Province's situation is currently exceeding the best-case-scenario presented in recent modelling, which indicated the Province would reach below 1,000 new daily infections by June 30, 2021. The Province expects these trends to continue over the coming days before entering Step One."

Added Health Minister Christine Elliott: "Thanks to the tremendous efforts of every Ontarian, beginning June 11 we will be able to cautiously lift public health measures in the settings we know are safest. While this is exciting news, as we move to enter Step One, it remains critical that all Ontarians continue to follow public health advice and roll up their sleeves to receive the vaccine."

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter