

Long weekend marks beginning of Ontario's reopening



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By Nate Smelle

Last week, just in time for the Victoria Day long weekend, the provincial government announced that some seasonal services and activities would be permitted to open because key public health indicators were continuing to show progress. The businesses allowed to open as a result of the government's announcement were all focused on encouraging tourism and recreational activities. The list included: golf courses (with clubhouses open only for washrooms and restaurants open only for take-out); marinas, boat clubs and public boat launches; private parks and campgrounds to enable preparation for the season, and to allow access for trailers and recreational vehicles whose owners have a full season contract; and, businesses that board animals, such as stables. During the last several weeks, the people of Ontario have been called on to make incredible sacrifices to help us stop the spread of COVID-19, including staying home from work, closing down businesses and going without a regular paycheck, said Premier Doug Ford. However, we are reopening even more of our businesses beginning this long weekend. We are taking a cautious, balanced approach to our economic reopening, to protect the health and safety of everyone. As part of the Ford government's cautious, balanced approach to reopening the provincial economy, it was also announced that starting on May 19 some retailers, seasonal businesses and health/community service providers would be allowed to open or expand their services. Reopening this past Tuesday were retail services that are not in shopping malls and have separate street-front entrances with measures in place that can enable physical distancing; and, seasonal businesses and recreational activities for individual or single competitors. Businesses offering animal and pet care services, such as grooming, training, and regular veterinary appointments; as well as those providing indoor and outdoor household services such as housekeepers, cooks, cleaning and maintenance are also now permitted to reopen. In addition, the provincial government has now also lifted essential workplace limits on construction. In terms of health care, it was also announced that certain health and medical services such as in-person counselling, in-person services, virtual health services, and scheduled surgeries, would also be allowed to resume. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, the government said Ontario's chief medical officer of health will be closely monitoring situation to advise when public health restrictions can be gradually loosened, or if they need to be tightened. In the meantime, the public is advised to continue to adhere to public health measures, including practicing physical distancing, wearing a face covering when physical distancing is difficult or not possible, practicing proper cough and sneeze etiquette, regular hand-washing, and staying home when ill. On the afternoon of May 19, Ford also announced that schools throughout the province would also remain closed for the rest of the 2019/2020 school year. In addition, he indicated that later this summer the government would release a plan to strengthen learning and safety protocols that enable students and staff to return to in-class instruction for the 2020-21 school year.