

Ontario extends Stay-at-Home order

By Nate Smelle

On Friday, April 16 the government of Ontario announced that it was strengthening enforcement of the province's Stay-at-Home order, enhancing public health measures, imposing new travel restrictions, and, extending the Stay-at-Home order by at least two weeks. Despite the advice of Ontario's chief medical officer of health and other health experts that compelled them to impose these measures, less than 24 hours after they came into effect the Ford government reversed some of the key measures it had put in place to stop the "rapid growth in COVID-19 case rates" and relieve "mounting pressures on the province's health care system."

Initially the province had given police the power to randomly stop people out walking or driving, request their home address, and question whether their reason for being out complies with the province-wide Stay-at-Home order.

However, Saturday evening Solicitor General Sylvia Jones released a statement indicating that police, and other provincial offences officers now only have the right to stop individuals to ensure they are complying with restrictions if they have "reason to suspect that you are participating in an organized public event or social gathering."

In response to additional criticism from the public regarding the government's initial decision to close playgrounds throughout the province, Premier Doug Ford announced in a tweet on Saturday that playgrounds would now remain open.

As of Monday, April 19, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken 7,735 lives and infected 421,442 people in Ontario. On that same day the province added 19 names to the provincial death toll, and 4,447 new cases to the total count. Also on Monday, Hastings and Prince Edward Public Health confirmed that another person had died of COVID-19; and that there are five new cases throughout the region. According to the health unit's website, between the two counties there has been a total of 814 cases. It also indicated that there are currently: 114 active cases (six of which are in North Hastings); 14 hospitalizations; five people in the Intensive Care Unit; and, one person on a ventilator.

"The rising spread of variants means we must take stronger measures to limit transmission and prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "As we continue to work to vaccinate those in the areas with the highest rates of transmission, everyone must adhere to public health measures and stay at home as much as possible to protect capacity in our health system and the health of thousands of Ontarians."

With the Stay-at-Home order having been extended for another two weeks, this means Ontarians must continue to remain at home with the exception of when it is necessary to pick up food, medicine, and essential supplies at the grocery store or pharmacy. Citizens are also permitted to leave their homes to access health care services (including getting vaccinated), for outdoor exercise, or for work that cannot be done at home.

"As we see the trends in key health indicators deteriorate to levels far exceeding anything we have seen before, it is necessary to follow public health and workplace safety measures given this continued and rapid case growth," said Dr. David Williams, chief medical officer of health. "By staying at home and limiting travel for essential purposes only, such as getting groceries or going to a medical appointment or to get vaccinated, we can reduce mobility and help interrupt transmission of this virus."

Under the Stay-at-Home order all outdoor social gatherings and organized public events, except for those with members of the same household (including one other person from outside that household who lives alone, or a caregiver for any member of the household) are prohibited.

Although playgrounds are still open, all outdoor recreational amenities, such as golf courses, basketball courts, soccer fields are closed. The capacity of weddings, funerals, and religious services, rites or ceremonies will be limited to 10 people indoors or outdoors. In retail settings where in-store shopping is permitted the capacity will be reduced to 25 per cent. Such settings include:

pharmacies, supermarkets, grocery stores, convenience stores, indoor farmers' markets, and other stores that primarily sell food.

Furthermore, in order to limit the transmission of the COVID-19 variants of concern, the government has also restricted inter-provincial travel into Ontario from the provinces of Manitoba and Quebec with the exception of purposes such as work, health care services, transportation and delivery of goods and services, or exercising Aboriginal or treaty rights.