

Second provincial emergency declared today for COVID-19

Written By Sam Odrowski

Effective today (Jan. 14) the Province of Ontario is issuing a stay-at-home order, requiring everyone to remain in their household, except for essential purposes.

Trips to the grocery store, pharmacy, healthcare services, exercise, and essential work have all been deemed valid by the government.

In addition to this, a second provincial emergency order under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act has been declared in Ontario as a response to the Province's doubling of COVID-19 cases over the past two weeks.

"The latest modelling data shows that Ontario is in a crisis and, with the current trends, our hospital ICUs will be overwhelmed in a few short weeks with unthinkable consequences," said Premier Ford. "That's why we are taking urgent and decisive action, which includes declaring a provincial emergency and imposing a stay-at-home-order."

"We need people to only go out only for essential trips to pick up groceries or go to medical appointments. By doing the right thing and staying home, you can stay safe and save lives," he added.

The new health measures are intended to limit people's mobility and reduce their number of daily contacts with those outside their immediate household. This is aimed at reducing pressure on hospitals to prevent them from being overwhelmed by severe cases of COVID-19.

The Province's latest modeling trends for the novel coronavirus have continued to worsen since the implementation of a Province wide lockdown two weeks ago (Dec. 26). A rise in the number of Ontarians infected with COVID-19 has led to increased hospitalization rates and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) occupancy, which has resulted in the cancellation of scheduled surgeries and procedures.

ICU occupancy is currently over 400 beds, while the Province's capacity is 1,000 before hospitals risk being overwhelmed. This level of ICU occupancy could come as soon as early February, according to modelling conducted by provincial health officials.

New health measures intended to further curb the spread of COVID-19 include limiting outdoor public gatherings and social gatherings to five people with limited exceptions.

As well, all non-essential retail stores, including hardware stores, alcohol retailers, and those offering curbside pickup or delivery, must open no earlier than 7 a.m. and close no later than 8 p.m. The restricted hours of operation do not apply to stores that primarily sell food, pharmacies, gas stations, convenience stores, and restaurants for takeout or delivery.

Non-essential construction has also been further restricted.

To help quickly identify and isolate cases of COVID-19 in workplaces and service providers permitted to remain open, such as long-term care homes and schools, the Province will provide up to 300,000 COVID-19 tests per week.

These tests will support key sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, warehousing, supply chain and food processing.

All of the new measures imposed by the Province will provide authority to police, bylaw officers and provincial workplace inspectors to issue tickets to individuals who do not comply with stay-at-home orders or mandatory masks. Those who decide not to abide by orders will be subject to set fines and/or prosecution under both the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to

COVID-19) Act, (ROA) and EMCPA.