

Ontario passes Stage 3 threshold, local mayors call for early reopening

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Ontario in the last week has surpassed the vaccination threshold required to enter both Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the government's Roadmap to Reopen, leading Ontarians to wonder if an early move in economic reopening is coming sooner than expected.

The government's plan to reopen the economy, known as the Roadmap to Reopen, has been based on province-wide vaccination rates as well as key public health and health care indicators, including declining hospitalization, ICU occupancy and positivity rates.

To move to Stage 2, the province would need 70 per cent of adults to be vaccinated with one dose and 20 per cent fully vaccinated while to move to Stage 3, it would need 70 to 80 percent with one dose and 25 per cent with two.

Ontario, as of Tuesday (June 22) had 76 percent of adults aged 18 and up with one dose and 25 per cent of the population fully vaccinated.

In the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health region cases have significantly dropped with the health unit reporting as of Wednesday (June 23), 48 active cases in the region, 8 in Dufferin, and a positivity rate of 1.8 percent. Headwaters Health Care Centre also reported on June 17 they had no COVID-19 positive inpatients at the hospital.

Despite this, WDG Public Health officials say we need to proceed with caution on a potential early reopening.

"We're encouraged by the progress of the local vaccination program. Our declining case rates point to the coming end of this third wave of COVID-19. However, we are only ten days into the Province's Roadmap to Reopen. With the growing presence of the Delta variant in both Waterloo and Peel Regions, as well as here in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph, we must proceed with caution," said Chris Beveridge, WDGPH director of health protection, in an email to the Free Press on June 21.

While the government has been vague on whether reopening will be sped up, local mayors are expressing their support for an early move.

"It's time to make that move, it might be a little earlier than anticipated but that in large to the cooperation of residents. If COVID has taught us anything it's that we have to be fluid, we can't be rigid about certain plans that we have in place," said Mayor Wade Mills. "That need to be flexible works both ways. July 2 was earmarked as the date for a move to step two, we've reached those milestones early so that's why I'm advocating that we make an earlier move. On the flip side, if we hadn't reached those milestones by July 2, then it probably would have made sense to push that off until we did."

"Any increase in that timeline or improvement in that timeline I would be supportive of 200 per cent," said Orangeville Mayor Sandy Brown.

Brown also indicated his support for reopening to allow for personal services such as hairdressers to open their doors once again.

"All what we're hearing now is positive news. I think the province needs to accelerate the reopening for things like personal services," said Brown. "Our personal service businesses need to get back running again as soon as possible."

The move to Stage 2 is tentatively set for July 2.

When looking at other jurisdiction's Alberta is lifting all Public Health measures, including the mask mandate, on July 1 and

Saskatchewan is lifting all measures except for the mask mandate and gathering capacity limits on July 11.