

Dufferin County enters Step 2 of COVID-19 reopening plan

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Dufferin County has officially moved into Step 2 of Ontario's reopening plan, seeing COVID-19 restrictions loosened further on outdoor gatherings, dining, in-person shopping, sports and personal care services.

"I'm glad to see that we're moving into Step 2, and allowing for more freedoms for our residents. We're not at the end yet, but I'm glad to see that the situation is improving such that we can move forward," said Dufferin County Warden Darren White.

"The numbers are really encouraging, they're so low in our local area, and it's a very positive thing for us. I would still encourage following the advice given by the medical professionals, our Medical Officer of Health, and Canada's Medical Officer of Health as well, because the last thing we need at this point is for us to go backwards. I also encourage people to get out within the guidelines and support their local businesses, particularly the small businesses that have struggled so much over the past 18 months."

The Ontario government confirmed the decision to move into the second stage of the reopening plan as of June 30, two days ahead of the 21 day schedule, last Thursday (June 24). Prior to the announcement the province was expected to move into the next stage on July 2.

"Because of the tireless work of our health care heroes, and the record setting success of our vaccine rollout, we are able to move into Step 2 ahead of schedule on June 30 with the support of our public health experts," said Premier Doug Ford in a news release.

In order to enter Step Two of the Roadmap, Ontario needed to have 70 per cent of adults vaccinated with one dose and 20 per cent with two doses. The province surpassed the threshold for Step 3 on June 23, with over 76 percent of the population aged 18 and over having received a first dose and over 29 per cent having received their second dose.

According to the Ontario government Step 2 of the Roadmap focuses on resuming more outdoor activities and limited indoor services with small numbers of people where face coverings are worn.

With the move into the second stage outdoor social gatherings and organized events will now allow for up to 25 people, while up to 5 people will be able to gather indoors.

The further loosening of the COVID-19 restrictions will mean an increase in capacity limits for businesses. Restaurants are permitted to seat up to six people per table for outdoor dining, essential retail can have 50 per cent capacity (doubled from Step 1), and non-essential retail can move to 25 per cent capacity, up from 15.

After months of closure personal care services where face coverings can be worn including hair salons will now be open with 25 per cent capacity.

Other areas able to reopen with 25 percent include public libraries, outdoor sports leagues, outdoor cinemas, performing arts, and live music.

Larger religious services, rites and ceremonies which include weddings and funerals have a capacity of 25 per cent while outdoors they are capped at the number of people able to maintain a two metre distance.

Ontario is expected to enter Step 3, the final step of the reopening plan with the most lenient restrictions, on July 21.