

Ontario reintroduces COVID-19 restrictions

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Ontario has returned back to a modified version of Step 2 of its Roadmap to Reopening as the province prepares for a 'tsunami' of cases in coming weeks.

Premier Doug Ford announced the implementing of temporary restrictions in a press conference on Jan. 3.

'As you know, like in other provinces and countries around the world, Omicron case counts are rising exponentially across the province. We face a tsunami of new cases in the days and weeks ahead and as we do, virtually everyone in this province will know someone who has been exposed to this virus,' said Ford during the press conference. 'Now, we're bracing for impact.'

The regression to Step 2 of the provinces plan went into effect as of Jan. 5.

Measures that will change include:

- ' Reducing social gathering limits to five people indoors and 10 people outdoors;
- ' Limiting capacity at organized public events to five people indoors;
- ' Requiring businesses and organizations to ensure employees work remotely unless required to be on-site;
- ' Permitting a 50 per cent capacity for retail settings including shopping malls;
- ' Limiting capacity to 50 per cent at indoor weddings, funerals, and religious services, rites, and ceremonies. Outdoor services limited to the number of persons who can maintain two metre of physical distance;
- ' Personal care services permitted at 50 per cent capacity and other restrictions with saunas, steam rooms and oxygen bars closed;
- ' Public libraries limited to 50 per cent capacity.
- ' Closing indoor dining at restaurants, bars, and other food or drink establishments. Outdoor dining restrictions, takeout, drive through, and delivery is permitted;
- ' Restricting the sale of alcohol after 10 p.m. and the consumption of alcohol on premise in businesses or settings after 11 p.m. with an exemptions for delivery, takeout, grocery/convenience stores and other liquor stores;
- ' Closing indoor concert venues, theatres, cinemas;
- ' Closing museums, galleries, historic sites, landmarks, and tour guide services. Outdoor establishments permitted to open with restrictions and a limit of 50 per cent capacity
- ' Closing indoor sport and recreational fitness facilities including gyms and outdoor facilities permitted to operate with spectators not to exceed 50 per cent.
- ' Closing indoor meeting and event spaces with limited exceptions but permitting outdoor spaces to remain open with restrictions;

The provincial government has said it will be expanding the new Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program.

According to a press release, eligible businesses required to reduce capacity to 50 per cent such as smaller retail stores, will receive a rebate payment equivalent to 50 per cent of their costs while businesses required to close for indoor activities such as restaurants and gyms will receive a rebate payment to 100 per cent of their costs.

A full list of eligible businesses will be available when applications for the program open at the end of the month.

As part of the move back to Step 2 of the reopening plan all schools will be moved to remote learning starting Jan. 5 and will remain in virtual learning until Jan. 17, subject to public health trends.

Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore has also reinstated Directive 2 for hospitals and regulated health professionals, which will see hospitals pause all non-emergent and urgent surgeries and procedures as of Jan. 5.

The move to Step 2 will remain in effect for at least 21 days (Jan. 26), subject to public health and health system indicators.

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