

Regional restrictions on recreation/sport facilities being lifted soon

Written By **Sam Odrowski**

Wellington/Dufferin/Guelph Public Health's top doctor is soon rescinding her Letter of Instruction regarding proof of vaccination requirements at facilities used for sports and recreational fitness activities.

Dr. Nicola Mercer's letter went into effect on Sept. 23, 2021, in alignment with the provincial COVID-19 vaccine passport program, but with the program being lifted March 1, WDG Public Health is following suit.

The lifting of the Letter of Instruction is welcomed news for Orangeville based physiotherapist Peggy Bond and about 20 per cent of her patients who aren't vaccinated against COVID-19. They've been unable to access fall prevention programs, stroke specific programs, and exercise programs for people with COPD or osteoporosis, offered at rec centres/sports facilities.

People that used to be enrolled in these programs twice a week, sometimes once a week to maintain and prevent decline were severely impacted, she said. I've had some people who access me who are paying privately for me to do an [in-home] program with them but the vast majority have been stuck not doing anything.

The key benefit of allowing access to the venues that run programs is preventing further decline, according to Bond.

We know that with those particular diseases, especially COPD, which is a progressive declining respiratory disease, that people need continued activity to prevent decline, prevent mortality. But also, to prevent cost to the healthcare system because of course, they're going to be the ones that have to go into hospital more often and have more interventions, she explained.

Same thing with strokes, people that have strokes tend to that have worse balance, so they're falling more. So again, they're going to lose function, so they'll be less likely to be able to live independently, and require increased levels of care, and also more medical intervention. We've got our people that have osteoporosis, they need to do weight bearing exercise, so again, access to facilities where they're going to be able to have equipment where they can do that sort of thing is great.

Bond said her patients who have less serious health problems are also happy to see the Letter of Instruction lifting.

A lot of people impacted were seniors, that just were actively engaging in a program, let's say at Alder Recreation Center, like their aquafit program for their arthritis or Zumba for their balance, stuff like that, she said. They were just doing it to prevent issues from getting bad enough that that they would need either to take medicine, or to perhaps look at getting things like knee replacements and surgeries.

Over the nearly six months that the Letter of Instruction has been in effect, Bond said she saw a lot of her impacted patients' health decline, and it will take some time for them to recover, but she's thrilled they'll be able to get back into their routines.

I think that it's a great decision, and I'm grateful that they [WDG Public Health] did that because this is going to help the overall health of our community, and overall decrease the impact on health care because this is available, she noted.