

Ontario lifting mask mandate after March Break

Written By **Sam Odrowski**

The Ontario government will be lifting mask mandates in most settings on March 21 and is set to drop all mandates by the end of April.

Dr. Kieran Moore, the province's chief medical officer of health, announced the new changes in a press conference on Wednesday (March 9).

"We are now learning to live with and manage COVID-19 for the long term," said Moore. "This necessitates a shift to a more balanced response to the pandemic."

As of March 21, mask will no longer be required in most indoor settings such as restaurants, schools, gyms, and large event spaces. However, the mandatory mask mandate will remain in higher-risk settings including public transit, long-term care and retirement homes, hospitals, jails, and congregate living settings.

Moore cautioned on Wednesday that removing the mask mandate "does not mean the risk is gone".

He noted the possible need to reinstate mask mandates if there is an increase in COVID-19 cases, if a variant of concern emerges or potentially during the winter months.

"We should all be prepared that we might need to resume mask wearing," said Moore, who also added he recommends the continued use of masks for those most vulnerable to the virus.

Dr. Nicola Mercer, medical officer of health for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health, released a statement Wednesday afternoon following the province's announcement.

In the press release she noted the region will be removing the local Section 22 Orders on masking on March 21, pursuant to the province's direction and will continue to monitor local COVID-19 conditions and response as the situation requires.

"While many of us are ready to take this next step, many are not. For families with children under five, members of our community with underlying health conditions and many who are just not ready to get 'back to normal', your concerns are very valid," she wrote. "Please continue to follow the public health measures that support your and your families needs."

"While we continue to move forward, there is no end date for the pandemic. We can each move forward only as quickly as our individual situations dictate. As a community, we have done so much together during this pandemic. We must continue to treat each other with empathy and kindness."

Mask mandates will be lifted as of March 21.