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New COVID restrictions in effect

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The Ontario government has introduced new restrictions on capacity limits and gathering sizes in the wake of rising cases of COVID-19.

Premier Doug Ford announced the new measures during a press conference last Friday (Dec. 17), which became effective as of Dec. 19. The new measures reduces social gathering limits for indoors from 25 people to 10 and outdoor gatherings reduced from 100 people to 25.

?We need to meet this variant head on. We need to do everything we can to push it back,? said Ford on the Dec. 17 press conference.

?It's clear Omicron will not take a holiday,? said Chief Medical Officer of Health Kieran Moore, adding that the measures will allow time for the vaccination of booster doses.

With the new restrictions, capacity limits have been reduced to 50 per cent for a number of businesses including:

? Restaurants, bars, strip clubs and other food and drink establishments

? Personal care services

? Gyms and personal physical fitness trainers

? Retailers(including grocery stores and pharmacies)

? Malls

? Indoor recreational amenities

? Indoor clubhouse at outdoor recreational amenities

? Tour and guide services

? Photography studios and services; and

? Marina and boating clubs

Restaurants and bars now have a seating limit of 10 people at a table and are required to close by 11 p.m., with the exception of takeout and delivery which are permitted to run past 11. The sale of alcohol has also been restricted after 10 p.m.

Food and drink services are prohibited at sporting events, concert venues, theatres, cinemas, casinos, bingo halls, and other gaming venues.

Dancing is not allowed except for workers or performers.

The restrictions do not apply to areas of business or place being used for a wedding, a funeral or a religious service, rite, or ceremony.

Ford noted on Dec. 17, that no decision has been made on whether schools will reopen for in-person learning following the end of winter break in January.

?We are simply not in the position to say,? said Ford.

However, Dr. Kieran Moore said on Dec. 21 that at Public Health ?they don't see a reason? to close Ontario schools.

With Omicron, he said ?we're not seeing any significant impact on children's health?, noting there are no children in pediatric ICUs in Ontario.

Moore also noted that Omicron's hospitalization rate is 0.15 per cent in Ontario as of Dec. 21, which is significantly lower than the province's general rate of hospitalization for COVID-19.

He added that there are no Omicron admissions that Public Health is aware of in ICUs.