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Province to begin easing public health measures starting Jan. 31

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The Ontario government has announced the gradual easing of COVID-19 public health measures with the first step in a three step plan set to begin this Sunday.

?We can be confident that the worst is behind us as we look to cautiously ease public health measures,? said Premier Doug Ford in a press conference on Jan. 20.

Starting Jan. 31, social gathering limits will increase to up to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors.

A number of indoor businesses and setting will be permitted to reopen with a capacity limit of 50 per cent, including:

? Restaurants, bars and other food or drink establishments without dancing

? Retailers, shopping malls, grocery stores, and pharmacies

? Gyms and other recreational fitness facilities

? Cinemas

? Meeting and event spaces

? Museum and galleries

? Bingo halls, casinos and other gaming establishments

? Religious services, rites, and ceremonies

The government is also allowing spectator areas of sporting events, concert venues, and theatres to operate at 50 per cent seating capacity or 500 people, whichever is less.

The second step in the plan will go into effect as of Feb. 21 with social gathering limits increased to 25 people indoors and 100 people outdoors.

The province will be removing capacity limits in indoor settings where proof of vaccination is required, including restaurants, indoor sports and recreational facilities, and cinemas as well as any business that opt-in to proof of vaccination requirements.

Indoor capacity limits will increase to 25 per cent in the remaining higher-risk settings where proof of vaccination is required such as nightclubs, weddings receptions in meeting or event spaces, bathhouses and sex clubs.

Religious services, rites, and ceremonies indoors will be limited to the number of people that can maintain two metres of physical distance.

Indoor settings where proof of vaccination is not required will see capacity limited to the number of people that can maintain a two metre distance.

Ontario will enter the final step on March 14 with a lifting of capacity limits in all indoor public settings.

Social gather limits will increase to 50 people indoors and with no limits on outdoor gatherings. Remaining capacity limits on religious services, rites, or ceremonies will also be lifted.

The province's proof of vaccination and masking mandates will continue to be in effect with no dates announced on when or if they will be lifted.

?There are some positive signs that we may be reaching the peak of the Omicron wave in Ontario,? said Health Minister Christine Elliott. ?However, we still need to remain humble and cautious.?

Each step of the province's three-step reopening plan will be separated by 21 days to monitor public health trends.

Ford said the province will implement pauses between steps if necessary.

?We want to do everything humanly possible to avoid having to go backwards. If that means pausing between steps for a few extra days, we won't hesitate to do so,? said Ford.