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Resume outdoor activities

by SAM ODROWSKI

The Ford government's latest announcement extending the stay-at-home order until June 2 came as no surprise, since the Province see's limiting mobility as the only viable method of reducing COVID-19 transmission.

But it was a little shocking to see outdoor recreation being kept close despite a growing consensus among health experts that outdoor transmission is extremely rare to non-existent.

Even a scientific director of Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, which recommended the stay-at-home order's extension, Dr. Peter Juni, said outdoor activities like tennis, golf, and beach volleyball are very low risk and could resume.

In a recent analysis of over 232,000 COVID-19 infections in Ireland, only one out of every thousand cases (0.1 per cent) were traced to outdoor transmission. A study in Wuhan, China drew similar conclusions. Through stringent contact tracing, the study's researchers discovered that zero outbreaks and only one out of 7,324 COVID-19 infections were linked to outdoor transmission.

Virtually no cases can be identified from everyday activities outside.

Infectious coronavirus particles dissipate much quicker in outdoor settings than indoors, with the risk of transmission being the highest in poorly ventilated areas.

In my view, the mental health and physical health consequences of telling Ontarians to stay at home for eight weeks straight are far worse than families, within their own bubble, playing a game of tennis or golf. Let alone going to a Provincial Park and camping overnight, as a family ? nope, too risky.

And with literally nothing to do but go hiking, local trails are constantly packed, often with people travelling up from Toronto or other COVID-19 hotspots, who would likely have stayed in their Public Health region if they could of engaged in some other ?safe? activity.

Even the Mayor of Brampton, Patrick Brown, has said the restrictions on outdoor activities don't make sense and is pushing for a change to the current restrictions.

It also appears that the most recent lockdown hasn't been any more effective in reducing cases than the much looser restrictions imposed in Michigan for their third wave, which peaked in mid-April, around the same time as Ontario. Michigan's seven day moving average for COVID cases has come down approximately 75 per cent since its peak, while Ontario lags behind at roughly 50 per cent.

Through the peak of cases in Michigan, common sense Public Health measures were in place such as masking and physically distancing, but restaurants remained open at 50 per cent capacity, in addition to gyms and all retail stores, also with capacity limits. Even movie theatres, banquet halls and bowling alleys didn't close down, while allowing 300 physically distanced patrons indoors or 1,000 outside.

I would have liked to see Ontario follow suit instead of depending on a stay-at-home order to lower cases. The climate and conditions are similar here to Michigan, even vaccine rates are comparable. Roughly 50 per cent of adults have received their first dose, while Michigan has covered about 55 per cent of its population.

Texas also announced its first day with zero deaths this week, despite being fully open, with a total population of 29 million, about double Ontario's.

At the beginning of March, Texas lifted its mask mandate and fully reopened, with the government putting the onus on people who are greatly concerned about the virus still, to exercise safety precautions themselves, instead of mandating it onto the entire population.

Here in Ontario, sweeping powers have been given to police to enforce the stay-at-home order. If two friends from different households decide to meet with each other outside for a coffee in their backyard, masked up and physically distanced, a neighbour could call the police who would then fine each of them $750 for violating the stay-at-home order. Same goes for a family that wants to utilize the soccer posts at a public park for a quick game ? they can expect to get slapped with a fine.

While I understand the importance of everyone doing their part to reduce transmission of COVID-19, staying at home should be a personal choice, not one that's mandated by the government.

It sets a dangerous precedent going forward, where Ontarians are forced to suspend their rights in the name of safety.

I'd rather have dangerous freedom than safe subjugation.