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WDG Public Health shares thoughts on lockdown extension

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While the number of COVID-19 cases have been on the decline in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health region, associate medical officer Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum says it makes sense for the province wide stay-at-home order to be extended.

?We in WDG have had some significant declines in our case numbers since we had the peak of the third wave. The peak of the third wave, of course, was higher than the peak of our second, but we've come down a fair bit since then,? said Tenenbaum. ?We still have a ways to go before we're down to the kind of numbers that we feel more comfortable with.?

The Ontario government announced the two-week extension of the current province wide stay-at-home order on May 13, due to the continued levels of COVID-19 transmission. The order will now be in effect until June 2.

The stay-at-home order was first implemented on April 8, when WDG Public Health was seeing between 500 and 600 active cases of COVID-19 in the region, with over 150 active cases in Dufferin County. On the day the order was extended there were 355 active cases in the region, 118 in Dufferin County, and six in-patients with confirmed COVID-19 in Headwaters Health Care Centre.

?When you put the stay-at-home order in place, it takes some time before you see the impact of that reflected in the numbers, and then beyond that, the hospitalizations and deaths often have their own lag as well,? said Tenenbaum. ?It's not surprising to me that we still have not come down as far as we'd like to come down.?

So, how far do doctors and health officials want to see the case numbers down before feeling comfortable lifting the order?

Dr. David Williams, Ontario's top doctor, has said there is no definite metric but the daily case numbers in Ontario should be ?well below? 1,000 before the order is lifted.

In the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph region, Tenenbaum says the health unit will look at a number of factors including case numbers, cases in specific age groups, workplace outbreaks or community transmission, rate of case growth, and vaccinations.

?We don't have one specific case number that we would base our decision on,? said Tenenbaum. ?It would be for us more about the trends than it is about the fixed numbers.?

When reopening in the province begin, regions won't be using the colour-coded COVID-19 response frameworks that was unveiled during the second wave of the pandemic. Instead the Ontario government will be announcing a new reopening plan, which Health Minister Christine Elliott says will be released ?very soon?.

Prior to the government's announcement, Tenenbaum told the Free Press that if the province was to reopen under the colour-coded framework than Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph would likely fall within the red ?restricted? category.

Speaking to whether he believes this will be the last stay-at-home order the province will see Tenenbaum said, ?The answer to that question is very much in our hands.?

?In my mind, if we can get the third wave really well in crushing the curve, and really do a thorough job of that as we continue to get vaccines into arms at the pace we currently doing that will allow us to have a more normal summer,? he added.

The stay-at-home order is expected to end on June 2.