

York Region placed under modified stage 2 restrictions

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal Journalism Initiative

The Region of York has entered modified stage 2 COVID-19 restrictions. The restrictions will last for 24 more days and came into effect Monday. York joins Ottawa, Peel and Toronto public health regions in a modified Stage 2, as a result of their trends in public health indicators, including higher than average rates of COVID-19 transmission. King Mayor Steve Pellegrini said it's very unfortunate, but necessary. He pointed out these measures are coming from the medical officers of health, not the politicians. He pointed out York (and King) are not immune to the virus, and local numbers are escalating. He did admit, however, the lion's share of cases are in York's urban centres. These restrictions include the closure of indoor dining and drinking in bars and restaurants, and the closure of gyms, fitness centres, cinemas, performing art and gaming venues. In addition, organized public gatherings will be reduced to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors. As positive cases of COVID-19 continue to rise across the province, York Regional Council and York Region's Medical Officer of Health acknowledged the provincial government and the Chief Medical Officer of Health for taking difficult but decisive action to help stop the spread of this virus in our communities. "While this is not the news any of us wanted to hear, it is a grim reminder the virus is still a threat to the 1.2 million people who call York Region home. It also serves as a signal we all must continue taking steps to keep each other, our families and our communities safe," said a joint statement from York Chair Wayne Emmerson and Karim Kurji, medical officer of health. "The impacts of COVID-19 continue to take a toll on everyone, including individuals, families and businesses across York Region. It is vital we all follow the public health measures in place, including staying at home when feeling ill, maintaining physical distancing, washing your hands frequently with soap and water, limiting gatherings to those in your immediate household and wearing a face mask or covering when physical distancing is not possible. York Region will continue to work with partners in the provincial government to monitor emerging COVID-19 trends within our communities. By working together and supporting each other we will get through this second wave and continue to build strong, caring and safe communities we all call home. Queen's Park officials noted in York, the number of cases and hospitalizations are currently trending upwards and further action is required to help stop the spread of the virus in this community. From Oct. 3 to 9, York Region's case rate increased by 49 per cent to 38.7 per 100,000 people, above the provincial average. The number of COVID-19 hospitalizations in the region have doubled over the past week. In addition, the rate of infection is increasing; the positivity rate is 2.77 per cent, well above the high-alert threshold of 2.5 per cent. Since Oct. 3, York Region has seen the total number of patients requiring an ICU bed jump from 63 to 72, and the number of patients requiring a ventilator went from 19 to 25 across the region. Stage 2 measures include reducing limits for all social gatherings and organized public events to a maximum of 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors where physical distancing can be maintained. The two limits may not be combined for an indoor-outdoor event. Indoor food and drink service in restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments, including nightclubs and food court areas in malls are prohibited. Indoor cinemas, performing arts centres and venues (except for rehearsing or performing a recorded or broadcasted performance subject to conditions, including no spectators) are also closed, as are museums, galleries, zoos, science centres, landmarks. In-person teaching and instruction (e.g. cooking class) are limited to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors, with certain exemptions, including for schools, universities, colleges of applied arts and technology, private career colleges, the Ontario Police College, etc. Team sports are limited to training sessions (no games or scrimmages). Schools, child care centres, and places of worship will remain open in these communities and must continue to follow the public health measures in place. Before-school and after-school programs will also continue to be exempt from these new restrictions and will remain open. In addition to the measures being implemented in the Ottawa, Peel, Toronto and York regions, the Chief Medical Officer of Health continues to remind all Ontarians to: "Limit trips outside of home, except for essential purposes such as work where it is not possible to work from home, school, grocery shopping, medical appointments, and outdoor healthy physical activity. Stay home if unwell, even with mild symptoms. Limit travel to other regions in the province, especially from higher transmission to lower transmission areas, for essential purposes only. Practise physical distancing of at least two metres with those outside your household. Wear a face covering when physical distancing is a challenge or where it is mandatory to do so. For additional protection, the Ontario government is encouraging everyone to download the new COVID Alert app on their smart phone from the Apple and Google Play app stores. As the number of new cases in York Region continue to rise, it is evident that additional action is required to keep residents and workers safe from further spread of the virus," said Christine Elliott, Deputy

Premier and Minister of Health. "Our government will continue to listen to the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health experts, so we can safely keep our schools open, protect our seniors and most vulnerable, and avoid the need to take harsher measures in the future. The health and well-being of Ontarians is and will remain our top priority.?"