

## Province issues stay-at-home order

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal Journalism Initiative

Residents are being told to stay home, as the province is in the grips of a COVID-19 emergency. In response to a doubling in COVID-19 cases over the past two weeks, the real and looming threat of the collapse of the province's hospital system Premier Doug Ford issued a new stay-at-home order Tuesday. "The latest modelling data shows that Ontario is in a crisis and, with the current trends, our hospital ICUs will be overwhelmed in a few short weeks with unthinkable consequences," said Premier Ford. "We need people to only go out only for essential trips to pick up groceries or go to medical appointments. By doing the right thing and staying home, you can stay safe and save lives." Effective Thursday, Jan. 14, at 12:01 a.m., the government is issuing a stay-at-home order requiring everyone to remain at home with exceptions for essential purposes, such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy, accessing health care services, for exercise or for essential work. This order and other new and existing public health restrictions are aimed at limiting people's mobility and reducing the number of daily contacts with those outside an immediate household. In addition to limiting outings to essential trips, all businesses must ensure that any employee who can work from home, does work from home. These new public health measures will help stop the spread of COVID-19 by reducing concerning levels of mobility as the province continues its vaccine rollout and ramps up to mass vaccination when the federal government is able to provide the necessary supply to do so. Provincial modelling shows growth in COVID-19 cases has accelerated, leading to increased hospitalization rates and ICU occupancy. ICU occupancy by is projected to be as high as 1,000 beds by early February which has the potential to overwhelm Ontario's hospitals. The number of COVID-19-related deaths continues to rise and is expected to double from 50 to 100 deaths per day between now and the end of February. Additional public health measures include: "Outdoor organized public gatherings and social gatherings are further restricted to a limit of five people with limited exceptions." Individuals are required to wear a mask or face covering in the indoor areas of businesses or organizations that are open. Wearing a mask or face covering is now recommended outdoors when you can't physically distance more than two metres. "All non-essential retail stores, including hardware stores, alcohol retailers, and those offering curbside pickup or delivery, must open no earlier than 7 a.m. and close no later than 8 p.m. The restricted hours of operation do not apply to stores that primarily sell food, pharmacies, gas stations, convenience stores, and restaurants for takeout or delivery. Further, schools in York will not return to in-person instruction until Feb. 10.