

Virus may have peaked, but physical distancing still needed to prevent further spread

The Ontario government released updated COVID-19 modelling Monday, which shows that the enhanced public health measures, including staying home and physically distancing from each other, are working to contain the spread of the virus and flatten the curve. However, the Chief Medical Officer of Health says emergency measures must remain in place to continue reducing the number of cases and deaths. "The modelling clearly demonstrates that we are making progress in our fight against this deadly virus. That's due to the actions of all Ontarians, those who are staying home and practising physical distancing, and to the heroic efforts of our frontline health care workers," said Premier Doug Ford. "But COVID-19 continues to be a clear and present danger, especially to our seniors and most vulnerable citizens. That is why we must continue to follow the advice of our Chief Medical Officer of Health and stay the course in order to keep people safe and healthy." Key highlights from the modelling update include: The wave of new community spread cases of COVID-19 in Ontario appears to have peaked. Outbreaks in long-term care and congregate settings continue to be a major concern. Concerted actions are underway to protect vulnerable people in these settings. Ontario is now trending toward a best case scenario rather than a worst case scenario and has significantly improved its standing as compared to March modelling. The province has avoided a significant surge in cases. Total cumulative cases are forecast to be substantially lower than worst case or even moderate case scenarios projected by previous models. While several hundred new cases are identified daily in Ontario, hospitals across the province have not been overwhelmed by the COVID-19 outbreak as a result of capacity planning and the public health measures currently in place. The rate of growth day-over-day is declining. To further reduce the number of cases and deaths, it remains critical that Ontarians continue to adhere to public health measures, including staying home and practicing physical distancing if they must go out for essential reasons only. "The information released shows early but unmistakable signs that our efforts are working," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "These numbers are not an accident. They are the result of months of planning and collective action to stop the spread of COVID-19 and flatten the curve. However, in order for these projections to become reality, each of us must continue to stay home as much possible and practise physical distancing." To enhance protections for residents and staff in long-term care homes, last week Ontario launched the COVID-19 Action Plan: Long-Term Care Homes. This action plan will ensure the implementation of critical new measures to prevent further outbreaks and deaths from COVID-19 in long-term care homes. These measures include enhancing and expanding testing for symptomatic and asymptomatic contacts of confirmed cases; providing public health and infection control expertise; and redeploying staff from hospitals and home and community care to support the long-term care home workforce. "The new province-wide modelling data are encouraging, but we know that long-term care homes and other congregate settings will track on a different path," said Dr. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care. "We will continue to take aggressive action to support our most vulnerable residents and their caregivers. All Ontarians need to stay home unless absolutely necessary for essential trips, such as accessing health care services, groceries, picking up prescriptions or supporting vulnerable community members with meeting essential needs. If you must leave your home, go alone and stay at least two metres apart from others. Ontario has made improvements to its COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool by expanding its symptom list, addressing the most high risk individuals, and making it more accessible and responsive. Take these everyday steps to reduce exposure to COVID-19 and protect your health: wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer; sneeze and cough into your sleeve; avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth; avoid contact with people who are sick; stay home if you are sick.