

Ontario government taking steps to kick-start the economy, more businesses to open

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The provincial government has started the process of slowly reopening the economy as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

While Premier Doug Ford extended Ontario's state of emergency until June 2 on Tuesday (May 12), he has stated to lift some of the strict lockdown measures implemented more than six weeks ago.

Last Wednesday (May 6) Premier Ford announced that retail stores will be able to provide curbside pickup delivery, as well as the reopening of in-store shopping at garden centres and nurseries, hardware stores and safety supply stores.

"We haven't been sitting on our hands. Whether it's releasing our framework for reopening or putting in place the workplace safety guidelines needed to help businesses adapt to the new environment, we've been laying the groundwork for the safe, measured and gradual reopening of our province," said Premier Ford in a recent news release. "As the trends improve, we can move forward with reopening more and more of our economy and getting people back to work."

Working on reopening the economy has become the largest conversation topic for local, provincial and federal officials.

The Ontario government has released a series of stages on how they plan on reopening the province. Each stage is to be assessed by health officials before being ratified.

Stage one includes opening a selection of workplaces that meet certain guidelines, a possible increase of individuals within social gatherings and reopening outdoor spaces. Each stage includes the safety protocols of physical distancing, consistent hand washing and staying home if sick. Stage two, similar to stage one, include opening more areas of mitigation plans, outdoor spaces and allowing larger public gatherings and the final stage will be the reopening of all workplaces and withdrawing restrictions on the allowance of public gatherings.

Each stage of reopening Ontario will be within two to four weeks of each other.

Last Thursday (May 8) garden centres and nurseries opened their doors to the public using the same restrictions as pharmacies and grocery stores. Hardware stores reopened for in-store shopping on Friday (May 9) and retail stores, with a street entrance, are now allowed to provide curbside pick-up and delivery services as of Monday (May 11).

Manager of Glen Echo Nurseries in Caledon, Valerie Wylie, is excited and nervous as they begin to reopen, with their busiest weekend coming up.

"It's going to be challenging for sure, especially as we're coming up to our long weekend, which is traditionally the busiest weekend of the year. We're practising safety, we've got to follow all of the safety recommendations. We've completely changed the layout of how people get in the store. What used to be our front door, is now our cash exits," Wylie explained. "We've had to make changes, as everybody has."

The Ministry of Labour, Training Skills and Development released over 60 health and safety guidelines for businesses reopening their stores, including those for curb side pickups and deliveries.

"People, like everywhere else, will have to line-up and wait their turn. We have to limit numbers of customers in the building. That being said, those that are coming and purchasing their trees, shrubs and roses, that's all out in the garden centre, and we've got acres. So, we're able to organize the physical distancing a little easier in that part of the nursery," said Wylie.

With the May long weekend only a couple days away, garden centres and nurseries prepare for long line ups and busy activity throughout the four days. But, Wylie and her team at Glen Echo are excited to finally be able to open their doors for the spring and summer season.

“We were doing the curbside pickup before, and it was great. Everybody was really appreciative as they are all dying to get into the garden. The popularity of vegetable gardening is huge because people are at home and they're worried about their food source,” she said. “The demand will likely outweigh the availability this year.”

She added, “We're thrilled to be open again.”