

## ?Emergency brake? will provide more time to get vaccines in arms: MPP Jones

By **ROB PAUL**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On Thursday, April 1, Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson held a virtual town hall meeting for the public and was joined by Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones and Peel Region's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Lawrence Loh.

The focus of the town hall was to discuss the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caledon area and how the provincial lockdown announced by Premier Doug Ford will affect the coming weeks.

Mayor Thompson opened the town hall meeting by reflecting on the last year and thanking Dr. Loh and his team, MPP Jones, and the frontline workers who have worked to keep everyone safe during these difficult times. ?It always seems like the last mile is the hardest to run in a marathon or in anything you go to do, that last thing you do is always the hardest,? said Thompson. ?I really believe we're here as we can see the vaccines at the finish line as we go to pick up our prize. It just seems that last hill seems to be the long one to get over. We're in a Grey (lockdown) and now the rest of the province is joining us. I continue to be very grateful to the many people who have be on the frontlines in these challenging conditions over this last year. I'm looking forward with hope on the work being done to get everyone vaccinated.?

Dr. Loh thanked Thompson, Caledon Council, and the people of Caledon for their support, leadership, and recognition of this unprecedented situation.

He also touched on the tough decision he has had to make for Peel Region but knows it's for the greater good.

?It goes against every fibre of my being to recommend what I recommend, but I'm ultimately a scientist first and foremost and I'm guided by the data, the evidence, and the science,? said Dr. Loh. ?I enjoy a nice night out and dinner with family and friends and socializing with people in three dimensions and not in a constant world of squares. The sacrifices of our town have saved lives and has made a difference, especially when we compare what has happened elsewhere in the world. We're fortunate that the measures that have been taken have ensured that once this is through, while we all might be picking up the pieces afterwards, at least we're there, and many of us will be there to ensure we're able to rebuild and build stronger.?

Since the town hall meeting, Dr. Loh made the decision to close schools in Peel through April 18 due to the variants in the area spreading quicker and having more critical effects on the youth.

?We're in a situation in the Region of Peel where the previous declines we had been seeing following the Christmas holidays have essentially all been erased,? said Dr. Loh. ?We're now starting to see that the variants of concern are spreading. The reason why you're starting to see this surge is because they (the variants) are more transmissible at baseline. When an exposure occurs, it's more likely that people are actually going to end up infected with COVID-19.

?We know we need to continue doing what we're doing, but we need to do it that much better to ensure that the precautions are keeping ourselves, our loved ones, and each other safe. We're increasingly seeing in the halls of our hospital that they're more deadly. We're seeing younger people showing up at hospitals sicker and needing intensive care sooner. The transmissibility is what's explaining the surging cases, but it's the severity and the increasing demands on our intensive care in our hospital system that's really pushing the significant burden and what brought around the provinces decision to move the entire province back into broader closure.?

Although the current situation with the provincial lockdown and school closures in Peel can seem grim, Dr. Loh remains positive as he sees the substantial difference being made with increased vaccine availability.

"It's exciting," said Dr. Loh. "We had very limited vaccine supply throughout the first quarter of this year, now that we're heading into the second quarter, we're seeing our supplies go up, which means more and more appointments and opportunities for our residents to access this protection. We're finally in a place where we've got the allocation, we've got the appointments, we just need folks who are eligible to step up and get their shot. If you're over 60, now is your opportunity to get the vaccine and I highly encourage it."

As a member of the Ontario Legislature, Jones commented on the decision for the province to swiftly enter a lockdown and acknowledged it can be shocking, but the quicker these decisions are made, the more lives that can be saved.

"This four-week emergency break is going to give us and our health units sometime to get more vaccines into people's arms," said Jones. "We're at 2.3 million Ontario citizens who have been given at least their first dose. All we have to do is look at how few long-term care outbreaks and retirement home outbreaks there have been, which speaks to us doing the right thing by vaccinating our older most vulnerable first."

"Now, four weeks as challenging as it is for us personally and our businesses in particular, it really will give us the opportunity to get more vaccinated. The positive news is we are starting to see the quantity and inventory increase. I know that many public health units across Ontario have had capacity to give a lot more vaccines out than they've had inventory—we're now starting to see that turn around. If there's anything we have learned with this pandemic, it's when you act quickly and react quickly, you can lower the incidence rate."

Both Mayor Thompson and Dr. Loh closed the town hall by asking that all Caledon residents continue to be diligent by following all guidelines, keeping their distance, and wearing masks while also staying informed on when they're eligible to get vaccinated.

"I think it's absolutely vital for our Caledon residents to remember that this is not over yet, we absolutely need to ensure that we are sticking to the precautions and staying safe," Loh said. "When your turn comes, make sure you're making an appointment and getting vaccinated without delay—that's the quickest way for us to get out of this all together."

For more information regarding COVID-19 vaccine eligibility and booking, visit [peelregion.ca/coronavirus/vaccine](https://peelregion.ca/coronavirus/vaccine).