

Four confirmed COVID-19 cases in WDGPH unit region

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

The Ontario government has ordered all essential services to close due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 virus.

The move comes after Peel Public Health strongly recommended, last Friday (March 20), that all non-essential services across the province should be closed to prevent the virus from spreading, while continuing to encourage resident to practice social distancing.

"In the past day, we are beginning to see evidence of community transmission of COVID-19 in our Region," said Dr. Lawrence Loh, interim Medical Officer of Health for the Region of Peel in a previous news release. "We are grateful that many businesses have already changed their operations to help limit spread of the disease. At this critical moment, however, we must take stricter measures if we are going to succeed at limiting the impacts of this disease on our community. For this reason, I am recommending the closure of all non-essential businesses."

Premier Doug Ford says the Ontario government has "been in constant contact with the public health sector, listening to every word and recommendation thrown their way to be able to ensure what's best for Ontarians."

He said, "This was a tough decision, but the right decision, as this is no time for half measures. I have said since day one we will, and we must, take all steps necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19. The health and safety of every Ontarian must come first. The health of you, your children, your grandparents and your friends depend on all of us doing our part."

A list of what it considered to be essential was released late Monday night, including 74 titles under the following categories: Supply chains, Retail and wholesaling, Food service, but only for delivery or takeout, and accommodations including hotels, motels and student residences, Institutional, residential, commercial and industrial maintenance, Telecommunications and service providers, Transportation, Manufacturing and production, Agriculture and food production, Construction, Financial activities, including credit unions, insurance etc., Resources, Environmental services, Utilities and community services, Communication industries, including news media, Research, Health care, seniors care and social services, Justice sector, and Business regulators and inspectors. Specifics can be found at [Ontario.ca](#)

"While this was a difficult decision, we trust that Ontario's business leaders will be able to promote safety while carrying out business and protecting jobs," said Premier Doug Ford. "The grocery store clerks, transit and hydro workers and truckers are out there on the front lines making sure the people of Ontario continue to have access to the products and services they need. It is essential that their workplaces be kept as safe as possible so these local heroes can return home to their families worry free."

Due to the pressure put on healthcare workers in hospitals, being overwhelmed with cases of possible contamination of COVID-19, a total of 58 assessment centres have been opened across the province, including on at Headwaters Health Care Centre in Orangeville. An online assessment tool has been developed and made available for those who believe they may be showing symptoms of COVID-19. Some of those symptoms include a fever, cough, runny nose and respiratory issues.

The online tool takes individuals through a series of questions and provides them direction regarding whether they should stay home and self-isolate, visit a local assessment centre, or go straight to the hospital.

"I encourage anyone who may have been exposed to COVID-19, have symptoms or may have travelled outside of Canada to first self-isolate and then take a few seconds to complete our new online assessment tool," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "This easy-to-use tool, developed with guidance from Dr. Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, is a great first step in that process. By answering a few questions, Ontarians will be able to make informed choices about what to do, while the province collects real-time data to enhance our ongoing response."

Social distancing has been one of the main encouragements from health and government officials towards the public. Social distancing is defined as minimizing close contact with others by avoiding crowded places and gatherings, limiting physical contact such as hugging and shaking hands and keeping a two arm's length from others as much as possible. Canadians are also being encouraged to stay home as much as possible.

Due to the lack of response in the request for individuals to social distance, the federal government is considering enforcing strict legislation to fine those who refuse to take the issue seriously. Those who fail to practice proper social distancing can be fined up to \$1,000 and businesses up to \$500,000.

Although voluntary compliance is always preferred, under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, there are consequences for individuals and businesses that choose to defy the act while it is in force, said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a news release this past Friday.

With the Ontario government declaring a state of emergency, gatherings of 50 people or more are now prohibited until March 31.

Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson echoed the words of Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Ford, pleading with local residents to practice social distancing and self-isolate where possible.

I'm in daily meetings with Peel Public Health and the most important message that our Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Loh, is asking us to share is the need to practice social distancing and if possible, stay home, said Mayor Allan Thompson. It's the only way we are going to slow down the spread and spare many of our vulnerable citizens.

As of March 24, with 85 reported new cases, Ontario has now 588 confirmed cases of COVID-19. For ore information and updates, please visit [Ontario.ca](#).