

MPP Jones and Dr. Loh urge Peel residents to get vaccinated to keep the community safe through reopen

By Rob Paul

On Monday evening, Mayor Allan Thompson hosted a virtual town hall regarding the current COVID-19 situation in Caledon.

Thompson was joined by Peel Medical Officer of Health Dr. Lawrence Loh and Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones.

With Step Three of Ontario's reopen underway and the Town of Caledon preparing to reopen facilities on Friday, July 23, Thompson praised Loh, Jones and the community of Caledon for everything they've done since the pandemic hit Canada in March of 2020.

"I want to thank Dr. Loh for his heroic effort in keeping our community safe during these past 16 months," said Thompson. "I also want to thank Sylvia Jones, who has worked extremely hard in our community and at the provincial cabinet table.

"Our residents, who have endure so many challenges and the changes they've made in showing tremendous resilience, you have stepped up to support each other through supporting our local businesses, supporting your neighbours, supporting the elderly, and if we can keep that going, we'll recover sooner. I want to thank our whole community for what they're doing, and the volunteering has been amazing as well."

Despite the pandemic's end seemingly on the horizon, Jones wanted to stress the importance of having everyone vaccinated to ensure safety and even mentioned having tough conversations with those who are choosing to be unvaccinated and posing a safety risk.

"Tonight, and the last month or so, has been pretty positive on the vaccine front," said Jones. "Many of these problems go away when we have sufficient inventory of vaccines, and that is now happening. We've seen people's willingness to become vaccinated and it's really making a difference.

"When you start to track the numbers on who is still unfortunately getting sick or hospitalized, it is often the individuals who have no vaccine or only one dose. There's a lot of positive news coming out on the vaccine front, and I ask people to continue to have those conversations with friends and family because as our vaccine numbers increase, the ability for us to reconnect and be with people we love and have missed for the last 16 months just becomes more important."

Throughout the pandemic, Loh has been a leading voice in doing everything possible to ensure the safety of the Peel community, even when it wasn't the popular choice, and he made a point to thank Thompson and Jones for their unwavering support through uncertain times.

"I've been grateful for the support your governments have provided to our community, which has really become a bit of a success story in overcoming some of the inherent challenges that drove some of the high rates of transmission in the country and as a result of a hotspot strategy is now seeing some of the lowest case counts and has not yet seen a surge with the Delta variant of the coronavirus that other jurisdictions have seen," said Loh.

As of July 20, the Region itself has had 111,669 total cases and 820 deaths with only 98 more cases in the last week and two more deaths. Caledon's numbers also continue to show promise as Loh noted, with five more cases in the last seven days to take the total to 4,441; there were no new deaths with the number remaining at 20.

Acknowledging that the pandemic represents an unprecedented situation and the longest emergency response ever undertaken by the Region of Peel's health unit, deploying over 80 per cent of the public health staff and bringing on hundreds of new staff to support vaccination efforts, Dr. Loh was pleased to thank the community for continuing to see decreased case numbers and increased vaccination coverage.

"Our case counts have continued to decline, even following the loosening of public health measures during Step One and Two," Loh said. "We moved into Step Three of the Province's Roadmap to Reopening on July 16 and I think a thanks goes to our community for the significant efforts that have enabled us to be in this position. Prior to the widespread availability of vaccines, the only tool we really had to limit transmission and the subsequent mortality and severity that would come with widespread COVID-19 in our community was the imposed measures. But we do know those measures took a toll on our community, even if they did save lives and protect our hospitals, health care system, and most vulnerable."

"We are very fortunate now that we're in a position with increasing vaccine supply and increasing vaccine coverage that we can continue to reopen and reclaim some of what this human health crisis has taken from our community. It has been an all-hands-on-deck effort to get where we are."

Vaccination wise, Peel has hit another milestone with 2,048,552 doses administered as of July 19?107,757 doses in the last week. In total, 1,198,346 individuals have at least one dose and 850,206 have completed their immunization?69 per cent of the population has one dose and 51.5 per cent have full vaccination coverage.

Although the vaccination rates continue to improve in Peel and Caledon, Dr. Loh highlighted that this is not yet over as the unvaccinated population continue to feel the impact.

"There still remain many people in our community who are unvaccinated, and we do know the data shows both in Canada and internationally that those coming down with severe outcomes associated with COVID or being met with mortality are often people who are wholly or partially unvaccinated," he said. "As our communities start to reopen and contact and interaction increases, choosing to remain unvaccinated is a risk. It presents a severe risk, not only to our community with the potential spread amongst unvaccinated people which poses challenges for our healthcare system, but also to those individuals because we now have something that can actually protect against severe outcomes."

"I want to urge everyone to continue with the precautions, especially in an indoor crowded setting where we're not necessarily certain of everyone's vaccination status and for everybody to get to full protection. We have an opportunity, we have one of the highest rates of protection and coverage in the world in Ontario and Peel and Canada, and I think it's absolutely vital we take the opportunity we've been given to try and get everybody vaccinated so we can really ensure this lockdown is the last lockdown."

With adults being prioritized for the vaccine, 80.1 per cent of residents 18 and older have now been vaccinated with one dose and 60.9 per cent with both. But as the end of summer quickly approaches, Loh and the Region are urging those between 12 and 17 to get vaccinated.

To help with the effort, Peel is launching a "Vax to School" initiative to ensure the safest possible start to the school year. In order for youth to be fully vaccinated by the first day of school, they need to receive their second dose no later than August 24.

Peel has added youth focused appointments between July 23 and August 1 throughout the region that can be booked through the Region website peelregion.ca/coronavirus/vaccine/book-appointment/#popup).

"I'm urging all eligible youth aged 12 to 17 to get fully protected through "Vax to School," Loh said. "We know kids want to get back to their friends, classrooms and extracurriculars. The quickest and safest way for them to do so is to get vaccinated at least two weeks before school starts."