

Ontario poised to bring in new vaccination policies as Caledon sees rise in COVID cases

By Rob Paul

As the fall approaches, Peel and Caledon are continuing to see increasing impact from the COVID-19 Delta variant.

For the third consecutive week, both the Region and Town have seen a rise in COVID-19 cases.

The total case count in Peel has grown to 112,725 with 893 deaths. That's 460 new cases over the last week?nearly 200 more new cases than the previous week's recent high (275). There were also 16 additional deaths this past week.

In Caledon, the total case count is now 4,526 with 35 new cases this past week and one new death to bring the Town's total to 21. Over the last two weeks, there have been 67 new cases in Caledon.

To combat the rising case numbers in Peel, vaccine efforts are continuing with 2,254,822 doses administered?31,144 in the last seven-day cycle (August 9 to 15). In total, 1,234,759 individuals have initiated the vaccination process with 1,020,063 being fully vaccinated.

Peel now has single dose coverage with 71.5 per cent of its total population and full vaccination coverage with 62.3 per cent of all residents?82.6 per cent of adults (18+) have at least one dose and 72.5 per cent are fully vaccinated.

With school just a few weeks away from resuming in-person learning, Peel Medical Officer of Health Dr. Lawrence Loh has stated that the latest students should receive their second dose of the vaccine to ensure full protection upon returning to school is August 24. Currently 82.1 per cent of Peel residents 12 and older have received one dose and 71.6 per cent are fully vaccinated.

Now with the Delta variant making a larger impact and the fall and winter months potentially increasing that impact, Ontario is making COVID-19 vaccination policies mandatory for high-risk settings.

Due to the Delta variant, the government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is focusing on increasing protection for the most vulnerable population?including seniors, immunocompromised individuals, and young children who are not eligible for vaccination.

As part of the increased protection, it will include making COVID-19 vaccination policies mandatory in high-risk settings, pausing the province's exit from the Roadmap to Reopen, and providing third doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to vulnerable population. The government will also expand eligibility for the Pfizer vaccine to children born in 2009 or earlier.

?Keeping a low rate of infection in our communities and protecting our most vulnerable is how we can keep our schools, our businesses and our social settings as safe as possible while minimizing disruption,? said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health. ?To provide the best protection to each individual while learning to live with the virus, we are taking action by requiring individuals who work in higher-risk settings to be fully vaccinated, by providing a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine to certain groups who have a decreased immune response and by expanding the eligibility to the children born in 2009 or earlier.?

To protect the vulnerable population, the Chief Medical Officer of Health has issued a directive mandating hospitals and home and community care service providers to have a COVID-19 vaccination policy for employees, staff, contractors, students and volunteers, and for ambulance services to have a COVID-19 vaccination policy for paramedics.

The vaccination policy must be in effect no later than September 7, and at a minimum it will require individuals to provide proof of one of: full vaccination against COVID-19; a medical reason for not being vaccinated against COVID-19; completion of a

COVID-19 vaccination educational session.

“While Ontario remains a leading jurisdiction for first and second doses administered and we have the infrastructure in place to manage outbreaks. The Delta variant is highly transmissible and the experience of other jurisdictions shows we must remain vigilant as we head into the fall,” said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. “By taking additional measures in high-risk settings we will further protect our most vulnerable, safeguard hospital capacity, ensure a safe return to school and keep Ontario running.”

Vaccination policies will also be implemented in other high-risk settings such as: post-secondary institutions; licensed retirement homes; women's shelters; and congregate group homes and day programs for adults with developmental disabilities, children's treatment centres and other services for children with special needs, and licensed children's residential settings.

“With the support of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, our government is taking action to make schools as safe as possible,” said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. “Our plan will protect our schools, ensure rapid speed with contact tracing, all with the intention of keeping them open for the benefit of Ontario students.”

To learn more about vaccine eligibility or to book a vaccine in Peel, visit www.peelregion.ca/coronavirus/vaccine/book-appointment.