

Ontario sets reopen dates as Peel reaches vaccination milestone

By **Rob Paul**

Last week, Premier Doug Ford and Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health, announced the Province will be reopening in a cautiously with a gradual ease in public health measures.

The reopen begins January 31, just under a month after Ontario moved back into Step Two of its Roadmap to Reopen.

"The evidence tells us that the measures we put in place to blunt transmission of Omicron are working," said Ford. "We can be confident that the worst is behind us and that we are now in a position to cautiously and gradually ease public health measures. While February will continue to present its own challenges, given current trends these are challenges we are confident we can manage."

As of January 31, Ontario will allow an increase in social gatherings to 10 people indoors and 25 outdoors; increased capacity limits to 50 per cent in indoor public settings (restaurants, retailers, gyms, movie theatres, etc.). Proof of vaccination will continue to be required for those settings.

Ontario will again ease restrictions on February 21 by increasing social gathering limits to 25 people indoors and 100 people outdoors; removing capacity limits in indoor public settings where proof of vaccination is required; permitting spectator capacity at sporting events, concert venues, and theatres at 50 per cent capacity.

Once again, restrictions will be eased on March 14 by lifting capacity limits in all indoor public settings and increasing social gathering limits to 50 people indoors with no limits for outdoor gatherings.

With COVID-19 impacting communities in different ways, to manage it over the long-term, local and regional responses by public health units may be deployed based on local context and conditions.

"Thanks to the efforts of Ontarians going out to get their booster dose and adhering to current public health and workplace safety measures, we are in a position where we can begin planning to gradually and cautiously ease restrictions," said Dr. Moore. "The months ahead will require continued vigilance, as we don't want to cause any further disruption to people's everyday lives. We must continue to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in our communities by following the measures in place and by vaccinating those who have not yet received their doses."

Vaccine coverage and third booster shots have continued to rise in Peel where 3,121,912 doses have been administered. 1,393,218 individuals have one dose, 1,241,912 have both doses, and 485,425 have received their third dose booster.

The Region now has 78.9 per cent of all residents with two dose coverage and 84.7 per cent with single dose. 90.1 per cent of those 12 and older are double vaccinated and 93.2 per cent have initiated the vaccination process. 83.2 per cent of all eligible residents (5+) have both doses and 89.3 per cent have one.

Hitting the 90 per cent milestone for two dose coverage in those 12 and older is something to celebrate, says Dr. Lawrence Loh, Peel Medical Officer of Health.

"We are grateful to the residents who have supported our collective efforts to save lives and keep each other safe through the pandemic response," he said. "Despite the many challenges and barriers we faced, our community came together through four waves, first staying apart to keep each other safe and then getting vaccinated. I'd also like to acknowledge the tremendous effort of our staff and all of our partners, without whom reaching these milestones would not be possible."

The Region has also seen more vaccine options available due to the supply of Pfizer becoming more readily available. Pfizer will once again be available as an option for those 30 and older after shortages prevented it for the last few months.

While the widespread transmission we've seen with the Omicron wave to date is starting to slow down, we know that getting vaccinated with two doses and a booster continues to be the cornerstone of protection for our residents against ending up in hospital with severe illness, Loh said. Both mRNA vaccines provide strong protection, but we know that some residents have chosen to not book an appointment and even walked away from clinics when faced with just one vaccine option. The opportunity to offer residents a choice of mRNA vaccine for first, second, or booster doses is thus critical to our continued efforts. With reopening on the horizon, I urge all eligible residents to get protected as soon as possible, without delay.

In Peel, there have been 6,395 new COVID-19 cases in the last week, over 3,000 less cases than the previous week's total, bringing the total to 166,312. The Region's death count has now risen to 1,092 with 22 new deaths since last week.

Caledon has seen 200 new cases over the last week to bring the Town total to 7,186. There was also one new death this week with the count rising to 24.

To book a vaccine in the Region of Peel, visit www.peelregion.ca/coronavirus/vaccine/book-appointment/. To schedule a third dose booster, visit hccovid19.ontariohealth.ca/.

To download or print a copy of your proof of vaccination, visit covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccine-booking-support#proof-of-vaccination.

To learn more about the official QR code system Ontario has implemented and to access yours, visit covid-19.ontario.ca/get-proof.