

Ontario takes a step backwards as social gathering limits reduced

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The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Ontario has reached a new high, with over 400 new cases causing the provincial government to take 'drastic' action.

The spike of cases has caused concern for health care officials province-wide as they believe this could be a possible second wave.

'Over the past several days, we have seen an alarming growth in the number of COVID-19 cases in the province,' said Premier Ford in a recent news release. 'Clearly, the numbers are heading in the wrong direction. That's why we are taking decisive action to lower the size of unmonitored private social gatherings in every region of Ontario. We need everyone to follow the public health rules in order to prevent another province-wide lockdown, and protect all our citizens, especially the elderly and the vulnerable.'

Ontario is taking a step backwards as social gathering limits go back to their original number of 10 people indoors, and only 25 people outdoors. Previously, under Stage 3 of the provincial reopening, indoor gatherings were capped at 50 people, with outdoor event capacity sitting at 100 people.

Premier Ford initially enforced these new limits on what he called the three most concerning regions - Toronto, Peel and Ottawa, but later made the decision to set it for all of Ontario following further consultation with healthcare professionals.

'We are taking further action to slow the spread and limit new cases of COVID-19 by reducing the size of private social gatherings across Ontario. This action is based on the increasing case counts that we are seeing,' said Minister of Health, Christine Elliott. 'As we continue to closely monitor the spread of this virus, we will never hesitate to take further action to protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians.'

The new restrictions do not apply to businesses or facilities, which include restaurants, bars, movie theatres, banquet halls and gyms, just to name a few. The spike in confirmed cases, officials believe, are coming from private social gatherings such as parties, functions, dinners and occasion events such as weddings.

Those who go against these new restrictions could face a hefty fine, with police authorized to issue tickets between \$10,000 and \$100,000 for offender (for event hosts). Police will also have the authority to force people to leave the premises and order temporary closures if they believe that location is capable of having gatherings that will exceed the limit.

Dufferin-Caledon MPP and Solicitor General Sylvia Jones shared her concerns and worries with us at the Citizen, but is hopeful that these restrictions will bring down the high number of cases.

'I think it's very concerning, when we had so many weeks where we were regularly seeing the numbers decrease and then to dramatically increase, I think is very disturbing,' she remarked. 'What we've been seeing, is where there are outbreaks, they don't seem to be happening in the places of business where the business owners and employees have done, frankly, a very good job of putting up the protective barriers of doing the additional cleaning, using the PPE.'

She added, 'It's these, for lack of a better word, unorganized, unauthorized, larger gatherings.'

The provincial government is going with the flow, and is hopeful that no further changes will need to be done in order to keep Ontarians safe. Jones states how it's hard to see what the future will look like, but that all they can do is monitor the numbers and act accordingly.

?I appreciate that it can be very frustrating for people who organize things. I've heard from a couple of individuals over the weekend, how their wedding that was in a backyard was going to be impacted. I get it,? she said. ?It is incredibly frustrating for people who have planned things and have to have them changed within the day or the hour. It can be very stressful for families and individuals.?

?But at the same time, the numbers do show that when there's a problem, we can't wait for a week, or two weeks to get it done and make the changes,? Jones explained.

Mayor Allan Thompson spoke out on social media regarding the number of complaints and comments he has received asking why Caledon is being grouped together with the rest of Peel Region when Caledon's numbers are fairly low in comparison to the rest of Peel.

?I spoke with the Province asking that they consider Caledon apart from Brampton and Mississauga, given our rural character and small population. Unfortunately, this is not possible with our close proximity to the GTA and residents travelling across the Region,? he stated. ?This has resulted in the last-minute cancelling of events and has brought on a tremendous amount of stress. I wish there was a way we could change all of this however the only path forward is to stay focused on mitigating risk. We are in this together and we will get through it together.?

There is a total of 47,274 confirmed cases of the COVID-19 in Ontario. 8,872 of cases are in the Peel Region, with 234 here in Caledon.