

## Schools to remain closed until February 10

Written By BROCK WEIR

Schools in COVID-19 hotspots such as Peel Region, York Region, Windsor-Essex, Hamilton and the City of Toronto will remain closed until at least February 10, the Province announced Tuesday.

The further closures came as Ontario declared a second state-of-emergency on January 12, which will last for a minimum of 28 days.

Just last week, the Ontario Government announced online learning would continue for elementary school students through January 25.

This initial plan was a change from restrictions announced during the holidays, which would have seen some students return to the classroom at the start of this week.

“With the public health trends where they are across the Province, our priority remains keeping students, teachers, school staff and all Ontarians safe,” said Premier Doug Ford in a statement last week. “That’s why we’re extending the remote learning period for students in Southern Ontario and the shutdown period for Northern Ontario, while continuing to provide financial relief for parents through the Support for Learners program as well as the electricity rate relief for all time-of-use customers. We have to get the numbers down and today’s measures will help us continue to stop the spread of this deadly virus.”

The Province contended that targeted testing done among students and staff last month “confirmed that schools are not a significant source of transmission [but] with students having been at home for several weeks and with reports of concerning behaviour over the holidays, the positivity rate among school-aged children has increased sharply.”

“Most troubling, the positivity rate for kids aged 12 to 13 years old increased from 5.44 per cent in late November, early December to nearly 20 per cent in early January.

“I have and remain firmly committed to getting students back into class as soon as possible - there is nothing more important,” said Education Minister Stephen Lecce. “However, the best medical and scientific experts have been clear: while schools have been safe places for kids, the sharp rise in community transmission puts that progress and Ontario families at risk. During this time, students will remain engaged in live teacher-led online learning with access to enhanced mental health and technology supports.”

On January 12, however, the situation had resulted in a delay.

“As I have said from the very beginning, when it comes to our children, I will not take any unnecessary risks,” said Premier Ford.