

South African COVID-19 variant found in Peel Region, first in the province

By **ALYSSA PARKHILL**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Peel Region is reporting 334 new cases of COVID-19 as of February 2, with 3,860 active, 50,720 resolved, with a total of 55,143 and 563 deaths.

Peel has been steadily in the 300 range since January 25, where numbers have hit 306, 379, and even as low as 295 on January 29.

Alongside Peel, York Region is reporting 124 new cases and 119 in Toronto.

Remarkably, Ontario is reporting a low number of 745 cases across the province, a significant decrease since 1,969 cases reported on Monday. Tuesday's numbers, however, do not paint a full picture as a technical glitch excluded Toronto's numbers from the total.

Caledon is reporting a total of 2,091 cases, followed by 34,034 in Brampton and 19,408 in Mississauga.

Peel Public Health announced on February 1 that the first case in the province of the B.1.351 variant of COVID-19 has been reported in Peel Region. The variant comes from South Africa.

The case involves a male resident of Mississauga who has not travelled outside of the country. He is self-isolating at home.

Amongst this case, Peel has reported seven confirmed cases of variants of concern (VOC), but is expected to see higher numbers in result of the increase of testing underway at the Peel Public Health labs.

"I am extremely concerned about the news of this variant in our community, especially with no history of travel. We are starting to see our cases plateau and community spread of this variant may change this suddenly," commented Peel Medical Officer of Health Dr. Lawrence Loh. "I urge all residents to continue to strictly follow Public Health guidelines and help break the chains of transmission."

Peel Public Health is working with the provincial and federal health officials to continue to monitor the variants and further protect Peel residents.

Additionally, the province announced on January 29, a six-part plan to improve proper screening and increased health measures to stop the spread of the new COVID-19 variants.

"We welcome the new measures announced by the federal government today, but we need a stop gap to prevent new cases, including variant cases, from arriving in Ontario until those measures are fully in place," said Premier Ford in a statement. "That's why our government is taking immediate and decisive action, which includes mandatory testing of incoming international travellers and providing additional layers of protection for the people of Ontario, especially our seniors. Through our six-point plan, we intend to stop this virus in its tracks."

The plan includes mandatory testing of all international travellers, enhanced screening and sequencing, continuing to maintain all public health measures, strengthening cases and contact management, enhancing the protection of vulnerable Ontarians and leveraging data.

"Urgent action is required to protect Ontarians from the new COVID-19 variants. That is why our government is implementing a six-point plan, which includes mandatory on-arrival testing of international travellers starting next week," said Solicitor General

Sylvia Jones. ?We continue to urgently call on the Federal government to impose a temporary travel ban on flights coming from countries where new COVID-19 variants are being detected.?

The first case of the UK COVID-19 variant was confirmed in December and 51 cases have been confirmed since.

It's been proven that the variant is not necessarily worse but could be up to 56 per cent more transmissible between individuals.

Alongside the UK variant, other variants of concern have been found globally from South Africa and Brazil.

To learn more, visit [Ontario.ca](#), or Peel Public Health at [peelregion.ca](#).