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Stay-at-home orders extended to June 2

By Brock Weir

This was going to be the week where we would be able to emerge from the latest round of stay-at-home orders, but it will be a little while longer until present health restrictions start to lift.

On Thursday, the Premier's Office announced province-wide stay-at-home orders would be extended until at least June 2.

?While we are seeing positive trends as a result of the public health measures put in place, we cannot afford to let it up yet,? said Premier Doug Ford in a statement. ?We must stay vigilant to ensure our ICU numbers stay down and our hospital capacity is protected. If we stay the course for the next two weeks and continue vaccinating record number[s] of Ontarians every day, we can begin to look forward to July and August and having the summer that everyone deserves.?

Between May 2 and May 8, present restrictions and vaccination efforts saw the Provincial case rate decrease by nearly 15 per cent, with the positivity rate standing at 7.7 per cent, down nearly a full percentage point from the previous weeks.

?Despite improvements, key indicators remain high and more time is required before the Province can safely lift the stay-at-home orders,? the Ontario government elaborated. ?From May 3 to 9, the Provincial cases rate remained very high at 134.9 cases per 100,000 people, and per cent positivity rate was above the high alert threshold of 2.5 per cent. Hospitalization and ICU admissions also remain too high and well above the peak of wave 2.?

Added Health Minister Christine Elliott: ?While the latest data shows that public health measures are having an impact, the situation in our hospitals remains precarious and variants continue to pose a significant risk. Experience from other jurisdictions shows that driving transmission to very low levels is needed in order to end the third wave. We must stay the course as we continue to quickly vaccinate more Ontarians, including our children and youth.?

It is yet to be determined when in-person learning will resume in Ontario schools.

All publicly-funded and private elementary and secondary schools in the Province will continue to operate under the remote learning model.

Data is to be assessed on an ongoing basis and medical experts, including the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health officials will be consulted to determine if it may be safe to resume in-person learning.

?Despite the progress we have made in recent weeks in our fight against the virus, we all must remain vigilant as we are not yet at the point where we can safely exit the stay-at-home order as our health system remains under significant strain,? said Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Dave Williams. ?By continuing to strictly follow all measures, we can further reduce transmission of the virus, safeguard hospital and public health capacity, and save lives.?

Added Solicitor General Sylvia Jones: ?The spread of COVID-19 continues to pose a significant threat to our health care system and the wellbeing of Ontarians. While we have made great strides, extending the stay-at-home order is essential to protect our communities, reduce the spread of the virus and save lives.?