

## Businesses to be fined if found not complying with COVID orders

York Region businesses will face stiff fines if found to be in non-compliance with health measures related to COVID-19.

A Class Order under Section 22 of the Province's legislation to promote the safe re-opening of the Ontario economy kicked in Monday, November 23, at 12.01 a.m.

Under the new rules, meeting and event spaces and other businesses, places, facilities or establishments, including banquet halls, will need to ensure all indoor and outdoor gatherings do not exceed the maximum number to safely maintain physical distancing.

No event will be allowed to exceed 50 persons.

Additional rules have also been handed down for malls and other retail stores.

Malls and retail store owners are now required to set a maximum capacity for patrons to safely maintain physical distancing, while keeping mall staff in common areas, stores, washrooms, hallways and entrances at all times to ensure these orders are followed.

They are also required to actively manage all line-ups or patrons congregating and ensure all patrons waiting in line-ups inside or outside shopping malls maintain physical distancing.

Given the media reports of overcrowding at the malls it is only natural that we would expect more people to be visiting our malls, so we have found it necessary to introduce additional measures, said Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health. Please remember that being in close contact with someone increases your chance of getting COVID-19. How we define being close contact is being less than two metres apart for ten minutes in a cumulative way. These situations can arise when you're in the middle of crowds and even though you may be wearing face masks, it doesn't guarantee that you won't get exposed. In a situation like the malls, we have thousands of individuals, there are bound to be several people that are infectious. It is important for you to take the appropriate precautions and avoid these crowds if at all possible.

I think it is important for us to realize that most of our businesses have been very compliant with the rules and we certainly thank them for that. Unfortunately, we have had many complaints with respect to malls and with the big box stores and grocery stores, which then has forced our hand in ensuring that we have taken more stringent measures. If there is non-compliance with our measures then upon conviction these corporations can expect a fine of \$25,000 for a day or a part of the day that these infractions continue. We hope that the businesses will do their part for the sake of our communities.

Over the weekend, the Ministry of Public Health conducted a weekend safety blitz of businesses in York Region. 14 officers targeted area businesses, resulting in 77 visits to grocery stores and big box stores.

80 per cent of businesses were found to be in compliance with Public Health requirements. No charges were laid and contravention was resolved with compliance assistance.

**By Brock Weir** Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter