

## Stay-at-home orders take effect Thursday to curb spread of second wave

Stay-at-home orders will take effect at 12.01 a.m. on Thursday, January 14, to limit mobility in the fight against COVID-19.

The Provincial Government announced the stay-at-home orders on Tuesday afternoon, along with an Ontario-wide state of emergency, which will be in place for a minimum of 28 days.?

As the number of new cases of the virus continue to rise, there is a ?looming threat? that Ontario's hospital system could collapse, said the Province.

The stay-at-home order will require everyone to remain at home with exceptions for essential purposes, such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy, accessing health care services, for exercise and for essential work. As such, employers must ensure that any employee who can work from home does so.

Additional measures announced Tuesday include restricting organized outdoor public and social gatherings to no more than five people with limited exceptions, requiring individuals to wear masks or face coverings in the indoor areas of businesses and organizations that are open, and requiring all non-essential retail stores, including hardware stores, alcohol retailers, and businesses offering curbside pickup and delivery to open no earlier than 7 a.m. and close no later than 8 p.m. These restrictions do not apply to stores that primarily sell food, pharmacies, gas stations, convenience stores, and restaurants for takeout or delivery.

?The Ontario spirit has lifted us through worse, the people of Ontario have battled through worse, and I know this time will be no different,? said Premier Doug Ford. ?Now more than ever, we need you?to do your part, stay home, save lives [and] protect our health care system. The system is on the brink of collapse. It is on the brink of being overwhelmed. We're at levels we have never seen before. Last week, I stood here and I told you that our province is in crisis and the facts are clear. Cases and deaths are at the highest level since the start of the pandemic and community spread continues to escalate. The?very dangerous UK strain of COVID is being found across the Province. Ontario had eight new cases confirmed today and if we don't move fast, our hospital ICUs could be overwhelmed by the first week of February.

?I know everyone is tired. I know everyone is sick of COVID, including myself. I know everyone wants to return to normal. New reports and data show one third of Ontarians are not following Public Health guidelines. Many are travelling and gathering. Now, let me be clear: I am not blaming anyone, only one thing is truly at fault and that is the virus. It just takes a moment. If you let your guard down, it can strike. Think of the teenager out with their friends not wearing their masks. They go home, pass it to their parents. Later that day at dinner, the virus passes from parents to grandparents. Within days, the grandparent is in the ICU and tragically passes. This is a story we're hearing too many times. Stories like this are why we need to stay home and save lives.?

Added Health Minister Christine Elliott: ?The measures we are introducing today are absolutely necessary to save and protect the lives of Ontarians. This is not the first wave. Now, community transmission is widespread. It is in our hospitals, it is in our long-term care homes, and it is in our workplaces. The number of cases and the number of deaths due to COVID-19 are at the highest levels since the start of the pandemic a year ago. In a few short weeks, our hospital and ICU capacity could be overwhelmed. Yesterday, 41 Ontarians died from COVID-19. It has been an extremely tragic year. Over 5,000 Ontarians have lost their lives to COVID-19 since this pandemic began. These are not just numbers or statistics. These were brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers and grandparents.?

Ontarians, she said, must change mobility patterns. Too many people are having too many contacts, resulting in increased cases, and the cycle must be broken.

The new orders also come with increased enforcement measures.

The Province will provide authority to all enforcement and provincial offences officers, including the OPP, local police forces, bylaw officers and provincial workplace inspectors to issue tickets to individuals who do not comply with the stay-at-home orders.

Additional enforcement measures will also impact big box stores, noted the Premier, with "inspection blitzes" over the coming days.

"We have been up front about the severity of the threats we face if the numbers begin moving in the manner we have seen during these past days and weeks," said Solicitor General Sylvia Jones. "We have said we would not hesitate to explore and exhaust all options necessary to protect Ontarians if the situation worsens, and it has. We are declaring this Provincial Emergency to allow for stronger measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and these measures will be enforced.

"If people are found not complying with these orders, they will be subject to fines and persecution. Penalties may include up to a year in jail. We are taking the current situation very seriously and we ask that all Ontarians do the same. It is critical now more than ever that people adhere to the orders and follow public health measures. Please stay home, stay safe. Orders can only take us so far. Stopping the spread of COVID-19 can only be done if we all band together and make an extraordinary effort to protect the communities our family and our friends call home."

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