

'It's not a calendar': Ford government unveils 'road map' to restart Ontario economy from coronavirus pandemic

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The Ontario government has released its plan to awake the economy from its coronavirus slumber, but Premier Doug Ford is warning citizens the province is “not going to be rushed into anything.”

“It is a road map. It is not a calendar,” Ford warned, urging Ontarians to continue following the protocols recommended by health authorities.

“The quicker we see the numbers go down, the quicker we can get things back to normal,” he added. “We had the economy on fire before and I’m confident we are going to do it again.”

The government’s framework for reopening the province outlines the criteria Ontario’s chief medical officer of health will use to advise the government on the loosening of emergency measures.

The stage-by-stage approach aims to ensure there are appropriate measures in place so workplaces can open safely.

Public health officials will carefully monitor each stage for two to four weeks and assess if it is necessary to change course to maintain public health.

The three stages were revealed as follows:

- **Stage 1:** For businesses that were ordered to close or restrict operations, opening select workplaces that can immediately modify operations to meet public health guidance.

Opening some outdoor spaces like parks and allowing for a greater number of individuals to attend some events. Hospitals would also begin to offer some non-urgent and scheduled surgeries, and other health-care services.

- **Stage 2:** Opening more workplaces, based on risk assessments, which may include some service industries and additional office and retail workplaces. Some larger public gatherings would be allowed, and more outdoor spaces would open.

- **Stage 3:** Opening of all workplaces responsibly and further relaxing of restrictions on public gatherings.

Throughout each stage, the government says continued protections for vulnerable populations must be in place, along with the continued practice of physical distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene, and significant mitigation plans to limit health risks.

"Turning on an economy after an unprecedented shutdown is not as simple as flipping a switch," said Finance Minister Rod Phillips. "We need to plan this out carefully to ensure we do not spark a sudden outbreak, undo the progress we have made and put the safety of the public at risk."

The government will consider factors such as the risk of the spread of COVID-19 and the ability to implement protective measures to keep workplaces safe. The chief medical officer of health will advise the government about easing public health measures using a range of set criteria, including:

- A consistent two- to four-week decrease in the number of new daily COVID-19 cases;
- Sufficient acute and critical care capacity, including access to ventilators and ongoing availability of personal protective equipment;
- About 90 per cent of new COVID-19 contacts are being reached by local public health officials within one day, with guidance and direction to contain community spread; and
- Ongoing testing of suspected COVID-19 cases, especially of vulnerable populations, to detect new outbreaks quickly.

Speaking about situations of sons and daughters visiting family members through windows, missing birthdays for loved ones and "once-in-a-lifetime milestones," Ford urged citizens to remain committed to the current public health measures in place.

He stressed the reason the government can begin talking about reopening the economy is due to Ontarians following the rules put in place to curb the COVID-19 spread.

"I don't want to set hard dates until we are ready. The virus spreads at its own pace," Ford explained.

"We're going to ramp this up like the province has never seen before," he added. "Bear with us and keep working like you have for the last couple months. We will get through this."