

No COVID-19 deaths in Ontario for first time since March, province reports

Robert Benzie

Zero.

That was the number of COVID-19 deaths reported in Ontario on Monday.

For the first time since March, the virus did not claim one life in Canada's most-populous province, a hopeful sign during a pandemic that has killed 2,734 Ontarians, according to a Star tally of regional health units.

"By no means is this job finished. We're working our backs off ... and we're going to continue working our backs off until there's zero cases," said Premier Doug Ford.

Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Ontario's associate chief medical officer for health, said things are trending in the right direction.

"We are very encouraged that the number of deaths ... goes down every week. The total deaths per week has not exceeded 50 for four weeks in a row," said Yaffe.

"Today, we have had no cases of deaths reported in Ontario," she said.

It had been 105 days since that happened on March 23, a week after the province was plunged into a state of emergency that Ford has said is to continue until July 15.

In early May, at the height of the outbreak, there were 94 deaths in a single day.

As of 5 p.m. Monday, there have been 37,984 confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 since March.

There are now 118 people in hospital with COVID-19 — 36 of whom are in intensive care units and 21 on ventilators.

In Windsor-Essex, which had been a hot spot due to an outbreak among migrant farm workers, there were just four new cases overnight.

On Tuesday, Leamington and Kingsville, home of the affected farms and greenhouses, will be the final two places in Ontario to enter the second stage of reopening, meaning their restaurants can serve diners on patios.

Ford said he would head to southwestern Ontario later this week to have his shaggy blond mullet trimmed by a local barber there.

Even though Toronto hair salons reopened last week, the premier said he wanted to wait until everyone in Ontario could safely get a hair cut before doing so.

Health Minister Christine Elliott emphasized it is still too soon to say when any areas of the province can enter the third stage of reopening, which would allow indoor

dining at restaurants and all other businesses to open.

“That information is being reviewed right now. I can’t name a specific date, but I can tell you that the team is actively looking at the data and looking to move into stage three as soon as we possibly can,” said Elliott.

Against this backdrop of positive news, there are warnings that Ontario workplaces need to be vigilant to help prevent any second wave.

Ford noted Queen’s Park is spending \$3 million to provide online health and safety training for 100,000 workers.

Emad Rizkalla, president and CEO of Bluedrop Learning Networks, which provides such training in five provinces and handles the Ministry of Labour’s skills certification, said online programs must be thorough.

“When we teach our kids to drive, we don’t just tell them to click on links from the internet. We give them instruction and get them behind the wheel,” said Rizkalla.

“We make them prove to us that they can handle this potentially dangerous situation. It’s should be no different with COVID-19 prevention in the workplace.”

Rocco Rossi, president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, which represents 60,000 businesses, agreed “governments must do more than post a link to a website and say ‘read this.’”

“The harsh reality is that we will not be at zero until there is a vaccine,” said Rossi.

A [May survey](#) by Campaign Research for the [Star](#) found 82 per cent of Ontarians believe there should be mandatory COVID-19 safety training in workplaces with only 11 per cent opposed and 7 per cent unsure.

The same poll found 63 per cent would like see bi-weekly updated training certificates for barbers, chiropractors, home-care workers, optometrists, and others work in close proximity to their clients. One-fifth — 21 per cent — opposed that while 16 per cent were unsure.

With files from Ed Tubb

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