

Ontarians can now expand their ‘social circle’ to include 10 people

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On the same day that Ontario saw its lowest increase of positive COVID-19 cases since March 28th, the Ontario government is updating its public health guidelines to allow for a “social circle” of up to 10 people.

Premier Doug Ford made the announcement on Friday (June 12) at a media conference at Queen’s Park, along with health minister Christine Elliott and Ontario chief medical of health Dr. David Williams.

“Today is an exciting day for Ontario,” Ford said. “Our public health trends are improving. For the first time in months, we’re under 200 new cases today. We’ve hit a new record for testing this week, over 28,000 tests in a day, and still an overwhelming majority of these tests, about 98 per cent today, have come back negative.”

On Friday, the government reported 182 new COVID-19 cases — the lowest increase since March 28th — and 28,335 completed tests, the highest number since testing began.

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“Today, we have more good news to share with the people of Ontario,” Ford added. “We know there are friends, families, and loved ones, who you haven’t been able to hug or come into close contact with in months. Today, the public health guidelines will be changing to introduce social circles.”

“This is a very, very important step forward. This change will expand the number of people who we can come into close contact with, who live outside our homes. Social circles will allow a family and friends to reunite safely, while reducing the risk of exposure and spread. This means finally hugging your grandparents, or sharing a meal with your parents or closest friends.”

Health minister Elliott explained that a social circle can consist of up to 10 people who are members of your immediate household as well as other members of your family, your friends, or members of another family.

“Our chief medical officer of health has updated public health guidelines, effective immediately province-wide, to allow for social circles of up to 10 members,” Elliott said. “Think of your social circle as people you can touch, hug, and come into close contact with.”

In a social circle, you don’t have to maintain physical distancing. Elliott shared five steps for establishing a “safe social circle”:

1. Start with your current circle: the people you live with or who regularly come into your household.
2. If your current circle is under 10 people, you can add members to your circle, including those from another household, family members or friends.
3. Get agreement from everyone that they will join the circle.
4. Keep your social circle safe. Maintain physical distancing with anyone outside of your circle.
5. Be true to your circle. No one should be part of more than one circle.

“Most people just start with whoever they live with — family, roommates, whatever,” Elliott explained. “They would be the natural start, and then you can build from there, It’s really just common sense for most people. It would be perhaps grandparents that they’d like to bring into their social circle.”

“In other cases, it may be a situation where two families might like to get together, where there are children of the same age and they want to be in the same social circle as well for the benefit of their children who can see each other. The parents in some cases can also share some of the other duties, perhaps taking care of the other people’s children so they can go to work.”

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Elliott stressed that a social circle of up to 10 people is different than a social gathering of up to 10 people, which the government is also allowing as of Friday (June 12).

A social gathering includes people from outside of your social circle, and you must maintain physical distancing of at least two metres from other people in a social gathering who are not members of your social circle.

“For example, the expansion of social gatherings will allow individuals and families to enjoy the company of others at backyard barbecues and picnics and neighbourhood parks while respecting physical distancing guidelines,” Elliott said.

When asked by a reporter if there would be any enforcement of social circles, Ford said that enforcement would be difficult to enforce in a province with 14.5 million people and that he trusts the people of Ontario to follow public health directives.

“The social circle police aren’t going to be knocking on your door,” Ford said. “We trust you’re going to be doing the right thing. Just follow the protocols. It goes back to why we’re at the numbers we’re at, because the vast majority have been following the protocols.”