

Ontario to impose province-wide COVID-19 shutdown on Boxing Day

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News & Community

Shutdown will last 28 days in southern Ontario and 14 days in northern Ontario

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Ontario Premier Doug Ford at Queen's Park on December 21, 2020, announcing a province-wide shutdown due to the COVID-19 that begins at 12:01 a.m. on December 26 and continues for 28 days in southern Ontario and 14 days in northern Ontario. (CPAC screenshot)

The Ontario government will impose a province-wide shutdown at 12:01 a.m. on Boxing Day (December 26), for 14 days in northern Ontario and 28 days in southern Ontario.

Premier Doug Ford made the announcement at a media conference on Monday afternoon

(December 21) along with health minister Christine Elliott, education minister Stephen Lecce, Ontario's chief medical officer of health Dr. David Williams, and Dr. Naveed Mohammad, president and chief executive officer of William Osler Health System.

"Our COVID-19 numbers continue accelerating at an alarming rate," Ford said.

"Unfortunately, despite the restrictions, we've seen growing numbers of people travelling between regions in Ontario. COVID is spreading rapidly from high-outbreak areas to areas with fewer cases. As it does, our hospitals are filling up more each day. We've seen a 70 per cent increase in hospitalizations and 80 per cent increase in ICU admissions in the past few weeks."

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"Remember, 75 per cent of our intensive care unit beds at any given time are taken up by people who have had car accidents, or heart attacks, or other emergencies," Ford added.

"Above all, we need to preserve capacity in our ICUs and hospitals, but because of increased cases of COVID-19 filling up our hospitals, we're on the verge of cancelling more elective surgeries — and we already have thousands and thousands of backlogged surgeries."

Ford said he is also "extremely alarmed" by reports of a new strain of COVID-19 that is much more contagious, adding that he will continue to ask the federal government to secure the borders.

"Sixty-three thousand people are going unchecked every week just through Pearson International Airport (in Toronto)," Ford said. "At minimum, we need to test air travellers when they arrive at the airport. This is critical. If they don't do it, we will do it ourselves if needed."

The province-wide shutdown will include the following measures:

- Restricting indoor organized public events and social gatherings, except with members of the same household (the people you live with).
- Prohibiting in-person shopping in most retail settings (although curbside pickup and delivery can continue). Discount and big box retailers selling groceries will be limited to 25 per cent capacity for in-store shopping. Supermarkets, grocery stores and similar stores that primarily sell food, as well as pharmacies, will continue to operate at 50 per cent capacity for in-store shopping.
- Restricting indoor access to shopping malls, with only essential retail stores such as grocery stores and pharmacies permitted to open. Patrons will only be allowed only to go to a designated indoor pickup area (by appointment only) or to outdoor designated pickup areas.

- Prohibiting indoor and outdoor dining. Restaurants, bars, and other food or drink establishments will be permitted to operate only by take-out, drive-through, and delivery.

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“This difficult action is without a doubt necessary to save lives and prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed in the coming weeks,” Ford said. “Make no mistake, thousands of lives are at stake right now. If we fail to take action now, the consequences could be catastrophic.”

The government is advising all Ontarians to stay home as much as possible, limiting trips outside the home to necessities such as food, medication, medical appointments, or supporting vulnerable community members. The province is also asking employers in all industries should make every effort to allow employees to work from home.

While the province-wide shutdown is in effect, the province’s current COVID-19 response framework will be paused. The government will evaluate the impacts during the shutdown to determine if it is safe to lift any restrictions or if they need to be extended. Ontario’s chief medical officer of health will assess and apply any lessons learned during the shutdown to the COVID-19 response framework after the shutdown ends.

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In addition to the shutdown, all publicly funded and private elementary and secondary schools will move to teacher-led remote learning when students return from the winter break on Monday, January 4th.

Elementary and secondary schools in northern Ontario can resume in-school classes on Monday, January 11th. Elsewhere in the province, elementary school students can return to class on January 11th and secondary school students can return to class on Monday, January 25th.

The government has also announced the new Ontario Small Business Support Grant, providing a one-time grant of \$10,000 to \$20,000 to small businesses required to close or restrict services under the province-wide shutdown. Essential businesses that are allowed to remain open will not be eligible for the grant. Businesses affected by the shutdown will also be eligible for property tax and energy cost rebates.

More details about the shutdown and support for businesses is available at news.ontario.ca/en/release/59790/ontario-announces-provincewide-shutdown-to-stop-spread-of-covid-19-and-save-lives.

Comments
