

“The reality is, despite everything we’ve done so far, the COVID-19 situation in Ontario is getting worse as these new variants continue to spread,” Ford said. “Our hospitals are reaching capacity, and patients in the GTA must now be sent to other parts of the province for care. In fact, we learned yesterday morning that admissions to ICUs in the past week are increasing faster than the worst-case scenario predicted by our experts.”

“I’m hearing from more and more of our hospital CEOs about the situation in our hospitals and ICUs. I can’t stress this enough: things are extremely, extremely serious right now and I’m extremely concerned.”

The stay-at-home order requires everyone to remain at home except for essential purposes, such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy, accessing health care services (including getting vaccinated), for exercise close to home and with the people you live with, or for work that cannot be done remotely.

Schools and child care will remain open for in-person learning and care and in public health regions where they are permitted to remain open, with strict safety measures in place.

In addition to the stay-at-home order, only essential businesses such as grocery stores and pharmacies will remain open for in-person shopping, with big box and discount retailers restricted to selling groceries, household cleaning supplies, pharmacy items (pharmaceutical, health care, and personal care items), and pet care supplies only.

Non-essential retail stores will be allowed to offer curbside pickup and delivery between the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 p.m., with delivery allowed from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Access to shopping malls will be restricted to limited specified purposes, including access for curbside pickup and delivery (via appointment), with one single designated location inside the shopping mall, and any number of designated locations outside the shopping mall.

Outdoor garden centres and plant nurseries, and indoor greenhouses that sell to the public, can remain open with a 25 per cent capacity limit and a restriction on hours of operation.

Other stores that can remain open for in-person shopping by appointment, subject to a 25 per cent capacity limit and only allowed to be open between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m., include safety supply stores, medical and health care stores, rental and leasing services, optical stores that sell prescription eyewear to the public, motor vehicle and watercraft dealers, vehicle and equipment repair and rental, and mobile phone retailers for sales or support.

The Ontario government has also announced it is expanding its vaccination efforts.

Beginning next week, education workers who provide direct support to students with special education needs across the province, and all education workers in select hot spot areas, will be eligible to register for vaccination.