

Ontario announces additional public health restrictions to contain spread of COVID-19

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Restrictions include two-week extension of stay-at-home order, limiting outdoor gatherings to household members, and closing non-essential construction

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Ontario Premier Doug Ford announces additional province-wide public health restrictions at Queen's Park on April 16, 2021. (CPAC screenshot)

With variants continuing to fuel the spread of COVID-19 in Ontario and straining hospital capacity, the Ontario government has announced the implementation of additional public health restrictions.

“We’re losing the battle between the variants and vaccines,” Ontario Premier Doug Ford said during an announcement at Queen’s Park on Friday afternoon (April 16). “The pace of our vaccine supply has not kept up with the spread of the new COVID variants. We are on our heels but, if we dig in, remain steadfast, we can turn this around. We’re down but by no means are we out.”

“The reality is, there are few options left,” Ford said. “It comes down to three things: limiting mobility, enforcing the rules, and getting vaccines into arms. And, as your Premier, it falls on me to make the difficult choices. It falls on me to do what’s necessary.”

Effective immediately, the government is extending the provincial state of emergency and the stay-at-home order for an additional two weeks, for a total of six weeks, until Thursday, May 20th. A six-week stay-at-home order was one of the recommendations presented by the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table earlier on Friday.

The stay-at-home requires everyone to remain at home except for specified purposes, such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy, accessing health care services (including getting vaccinated), for outdoor exercise, or for work that cannot be done remotely.

In addition to extending the stay-at-home order for two weeks, the province is implementing the following public health and workplace safety measures, effective at 12:01 a.m. on Saturday (April 17):

- Prohibiting all outdoor social gatherings and organized public events, except for with members of the same household or one other person from outside that household who lives alone or a caregiver for any member of the household
- Closing all non-essential workplaces in the construction sector
- Reducing capacity limits to 25 per cent in all retail settings where in-store shopping is permitted. This includes supermarkets, grocery stores, convenience stores, indoor farmers’ markets, and other stores that primarily sell food and pharmacies. Previously, capacity limits for retail settings was 50 per cent.
- Closing all outdoor recreational amenities, such as golf courses, basketball courts, soccer fields, and playgrounds, with limited exceptions.

Also effective on Saturday, police officers and other provincial offences officers (including special constables and First Nation constables) will be given temporary enhanced authority to enforce the stay-at-home order. They will have the authority to require any person to provide their home address and purpose for not being at their residence, as well as the authority to stop vehicles to inquire about a person’s reasons for leaving their residence.

VIDEO: Solicitor general Sylvia Jones announcing temporary police powers

Effective at 12:01 a.m. on Monday (April 19), the government is also limiting the capacity of weddings, funerals, and religious services, rites or ceremonies to a maximum of 10 people indoors or outdoors. Drive-in services will be permitted.

The government is prohibiting social gatherings associated with these service, such as receptions, to members of the same household or one other person from outside that household who lives alone. Drive-in services will be permitted.

Also on Monday, the province will set up checkpoints at interprovincial borders and will limit border crossings between Ontario and Manitoba and Quebec, with exceptions including work, medical care, and transportation of goods.

The province is also calling on the federal government to tighten up international borders and international flights.

This story has been updated with further details about the newly announced public health restrictions.

Comments
