

Stricter Provincial COVID-19 Restrictions Are Necessary to Slow the Surge in New Cases, Health Unit Says

Extremely difficult, but absolutely necessary.

That is the reaction of the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit (HKPRDHU) to new, tougher restrictions announced today by the Ontario government to try slowing surging COVID-19 case counts in the province. With many hospitals, ICU units, health care providers, and public health agencies (like HKPRDHU) facing overwhelming pressures due to COVID-19, additional action has to be taken now.

“All aspects of our health care system are stretched to the limit, so decisive action is needed to try and reduce the number of COVID-19 cases,” says Dr. Natalie Bocking, Medical Officer of Health with HKPRDHU. “These new measures are extremely difficult to enact, but are absolutely necessary at this point in the pandemic. I implore everyone to follow these new measures and do all they can to stop the spread.”

As part of its announcement today, the Ontario government is extending its State of Emergency and Stay-at-Home Orders by at least an extra two weeks to May 20 (they had been set to expire on May 6). In addition, the Province has also announced the following measures taking effect at 12:01 am on Saturday (April 17):

- Closure of all outdoor amenities like golf courses, playgrounds, basketball courts, soccer fields and tennis courts (with limited exceptions).
- Reducing capacity limits to 25% in all retail settings where in-store shopping is permitted. This includes supermarkets, grocery stores, convenience stores, and pharmacies (which before could operate at 50% capacity).
- Banning all outdoor social gatherings and organized public events except with members of the same household. (NOTE: people who live alone can have exclusive contact with one other family).
- Shutting down all non-essential workplaces in the construction sector.
- Temporarily increasing the powers of police to enforce the Stay-at-Home order.

As of Monday (April 19), the following additional measures take place:

- Limiting indoor and outdoor gatherings for religious services, weddings and funerals to no more than 10 people. Social gatherings associated with these services are prohibited, except for members of the same household. Drive-in services will still be allowed.
- Banning interprovincial travel except for essential reasons (as of Monday, April 19, checkpoints are to be set up at Ontario border crossings into Manitoba and Quebec)

For a complete list of restrictions, [visit the Ontario government website](#).

The provincial changes do not affect non-essential retailers, which can continue to offer curbside pickup and delivery. Restaurants can also remain open for takeout, delivery and stay open.

Dr. Bocking understands that people are growing weary of the shutdown and restrictions, but pleads with people to stay vigilant and follow these important public health measures.

“Our region has not been immune to seeing a significant rise in COVID-19 case numbers in the last week,” she says. “We’re at a really critical tipping point, and unless we follow the new restrictions, we risk losing complete control of the situation.”

She urges everyone to do their part, by following the rules. Stay home, only go out for essentials, work from home if possible, wear a mask when out in public, keep 2 metre (6 feet) apart from anyone outside their

household, wash hands thoroughly and often with soap and water, and cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.

Dr. Bocking also asks people to be patient and remain hopeful. "Warmer weather is on the way, and that will help reduce the spread of the virus," she says. "In the long run, as the supply of vaccine increases, mass immunization of people against COVID-19 will also play a major role in changing the trajectory of the pandemic."