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GTA

'We must not risk public health': Mayor supports delay in Toronto's move to Stage 3 reopening

By **Francine Kopun** City Hall Bureau

Mon., July 20, 2020 | ⌚ 3 min. read

Mayor John Tory says he supports a provincial decision to keep Toronto from entering the next stage of reopening, even though more regions were approved on Monday to enter Stage 3.

"We must not risk public health," said Tory, adding that he realizes some people will be frustrated by the delay, but too many have sacrificed too much to risk triggering another wave of COVID-19 infections.

"It will be worse for struggling businesses if we have to go back to a more widespread shutdown," he said, speaking at a COVID-19 update at city hall.

Tory was reacting to news from the province that Toronto, Peel and Windsor-Essex will remain in Stage 2 of reopening while neighbouring municipalities, including Durham and York, will be permitted to enter Stage 3, which allows most businesses to resume operating.

In Stage 3, bars and restaurants can resume serving diners indoors, with modifications to prevent transmission of the disease that has claimed more than 1,100 lives in Toronto since the first case was reported in January.

On Friday, 24 out of the province's 34 public health districts moved into Stage 3. Seven more got the go-ahead Monday to reopen as of July 24, but not Toronto, which also entered Stage 2 later than other jurisdictions.

Tory and Toronto's medical officer of health, Dr. Eileen de Villa, said Monday that more time is needed to ensure the city is securely on the road to recovery before entering Stage 3. They said also that they are learning caution from jurisdictions that have opened up, only to suffer new waves of infections.

"Overall, it's a question of observing the trends for a sufficient period of time to ensure that what changes were made in moving from one stage to the next actually have had the chance to play themselves out," said de Villa.

On Sunday, Tory sent a letter to Ontario Premier Doug Ford, asking that the province amend the Stage 3 order that will apply to Toronto to include more restrictions than typical Stage 3 reopenings.

Tory asked that Toronto bars and restaurants be required to keep a client log with a name and contact information for at least one person in each party to make it easier to conduct tracing if there is a breakout linked to the business; a midnight last-call, and mandatory face covering requirements.

Tory said Monday that the province was receptive to his requests. He added that legal advice provided to the city seems to indicate that while the city could possibly enforce such measures, it's not certain the city could. Having the province impose the regulations would carry more weight.

At Queen's Park, Ford said Tory made some valid points, but also noted that regional medical officers of health have the authority to impose such measures on their own.

"Just keep in mind, every chief medical officer, all 34 of them in the province under Section 22, they can put stricter restrictions on bars. And you know something, I wouldn't disagree with that," said Ford.

Ontario's chief medical officer, Dr. David Williams, agreed that some of Tory's suggestions were "good options."

At the city hall press conference in Toronto, de Villa also noted a significant spike in opioid-related deaths in the city — there were 16 suspected opioid overdose deaths over nine days between July 8 and July 17. Most of the victims were under the age of 40.

"Unfortunately, the ongoing opioid poisoning crisis has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and these dual public health crises are having a significant impact on our community," she said.

She added that an unregulated drug supply leads to people consuming unexpected drugs or contaminated drugs.

with files from Rob Ferguson



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