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GTA

# Can I go to my cottage this week? An epidemiologist explains how to stay safe as Ontario starts to reopen

By **Jenna Moon** Staff Reporter

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*Editor's note: This week, the Star looks at what entering the second phase of reopening will look like. Every day, we'll try and answer a different question about post-lockdown life.*

Ontario's regional approach to reopening means that most of the province will be heading back to work on Friday — but a handful of places, including Toronto, remain locked in phase one.

So can you travel to a city that has reopened? In short: yes, but you probably shouldn't.

A spokesperson for Rod Phillips, Ontario's minister of finance, told the Star that while the Ontario government is encouraging people to avoid all non-essential travel, there are currently no restrictions barring travel into phase two regions.

"Everyone should be smart about this," said Colin Furness, an infection control epidemiologist with the Dalla Lana School of Public Health. "Stage one people should stay put and, if they choose not to, they should perhaps expect not a warm welcome among businesses that are in stage two."

COVID-19 will travel where it can, Furness said. "It will exploit opportunities. That's what it does. And it's superbly designed to do that." Even if you personally have been staying home or are at a low risk of exposure to the virus, you should still be "smart and patient and ... think of others," he said.

"The people who are at risk ... they're store owners, they're the grocery store clerks, it's those front-line employees," Furness explained. "Anyone who works next to a cash register is in a high risk job. Let's be respectful."

Taking a regional approach to reopening is a good move by the province — and one that probably should have been implemented earlier, Furness said.

"Ontario is a million square kilometres, (has) 15 million people; vast regions of the province don't have COVID or have very, very, very little," he said, adding that much of the province likely had to wait longer than needed to reopen, while Toronto and Peel were likely pushed into stage one a bit too early.

For southwestern Ontario and the GTA to catch up to the rest of the province and reach phase two, it isn't the case count that needs to come down, Furness said: it's the proportion of cases with no clear source.

"If there's 1,000 cases a day, but we know that they all came from this one place," then the province can act and prevent further spread. But if there are just 100 cases, but "we're absolutely mystified where they got it from, we should be terrified and we should

not open,” he said.

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