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PROVINCIAL POLITICS

Ontario records first death of a child with COVID-19

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The number of Ontarians requiring hospital care for COVID-19 unexpectedly shot upward after weeks of decline and the province has recorded the first death of a child, according to figures released Tuesday by the Ministry of Health.

Another 23 patients have been admitted to hospitals with the highly contagious virus, increasing the total to 288. That's well below highs of more than 1,100 at the peak but enough of a change for officials to flag.

"While it's too early to draw conclusions from a single day of data, we're watching closely for shifts in COVID-19 trends," Health Minister Christine Elliott said on Twitter.

Circumstances of the new death were not immediately known but Toronto Public Health issued a statement to the Star's David Rider.

"We are aware of a recent death of a Toronto resident who was in the 0-9 age category who died with COVID-19, but not as a result of COVID-19. We extend our deepest sympathies to the individual's family during this difficult and tragic time, and also to everyone who has lost loved ones to this virus."

The increase in hospitalizations comes almost two weeks after many regions of the province were allowed to open more businesses in stage two of the recovery plan, which Toronto and Peel will begin Wednesday with malls, hair salons and restaurant patios back in operation.

For only the second time in 10 days, Ontario's number of new cases was above 200 as the Ministry of Health reported 216 new infections that outnumbered the 174 cases considered to be resolved in the last day.

That means the number of people with active cases of COVID-19 rose — a rarity in recent weeks — to 2,127 from 2,095 on Monday, when there were 161 new cases.

Of the new cases reported Tuesday, 168 were in Toronto, Peel, York and Windsor-Essex, where at least seven troublesome outbreaks of the virus among migrant and local workers at farm and greenhouse operations are keeping the southwestern Ontario region from moving to stage two reopening.

Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkins said 82 per cent of new cases in the last month have been in the south end of the county, in the Lake Erie towns of Leamington and Kingsville, and blamed farmers for not having enough workers tested to get a better handle on the outbreaks.

"I am so frustrated," he told a news conference, warning the fate of many Windsor businesses and thousands of jobs are hanging in the balance.

Three migrant workers have died — two in Essex and one at Scottlynn Growers in Haldimand-Norfolk, where at least 199 workers have tested positive.

There were no new cases reported by half of Ontario's 34 public health units, with another 10 reporting fewer than five.

Elliott said the number of hospital patients requiring intensive care and on ventilators continued to fall, but it's not known how many of the new admissions could require ICU or ventilators in the coming days.

Currently 75 patients or 26 per cent across the province are in intensive care, including 54 people or 19 per cent on ventilators to help them breathe given the serious damage COVID-19 has done to their lungs.

Outbreaks in Ontario's 626 nursing homes remained effectively stalled at 66, down two from the previous day, but the hard-hit industry has not been able to get the number below 60 after steady declines from higher levels in recent weeks.

At least 240 nursing-home residents and 346 staff are still fighting active cases of COVID-19, which has infected almost 5,400 residents and 2,205 long-term-care employees to date. The death toll of residents increased to 1,803.

Since January, the virus has infected almost 36,000 Ontarians and killed 2,653, according to a Star tally.

Testing for COVID-19 suddenly dropped, with just 16,189 swabs processed at labs across the province the previous day — at least 10,000 below recent peaks.



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