

Canada's Ontario province issues stay-at-home order

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Canada's Ontario province, the country's most populous and its economic engine, on Tuesday ordered residents to stay home as projections showed the number of COVID-19 cases could soon explode, overwhelming hospitals.

"Our province is in crisis," Ontario Premier Doug Ford told a news

conference, at which he declared a month-long state of emergency.

"The ([health care](#)) system is on the brink of collapse. It's on the brink of being overwhelmed," he said.

Effective Thursday at 12:01 am, Ontario residents will be required to remain at home except for essential activities such as shopping for groceries or seeing a doctor.

People also may go out to exercise or walk their dog, but outdoor gatherings will be limited to five individuals—a rule that authorities say will be strictly enforced.

All businesses will also be required to ensure that employees who can work at home do so. And schools will delay in-person classes for students in hot spots in the Toronto area until early February.

Ford said [law enforcement](#) will be empowered to "disperse people, and issue tickets to bad actors."

Ontario Solicitor General Sylvia Jones added: "Let me be clear: if people are found not complying with these orders, they will be subject to fines and prosecution."

Penalties, she said, include up to a year in jail.

"We are taking the current situation very seriously. And we ask that all Ontarians do the same," she said.

The new measures represent a tightening of a provincial lockdown ordered last month—which forced most stores to close—in a bid to slow the spread of the novel [coronavirus](#) amid a [second wave](#) that saw a spike in infections.

In a similar crackdown, neighboring Quebec province last week ordered the first pandemic curfew in Canada, which is to last four weeks.

According to public health officials, Ontario could see as many as 40,000 new virus cases a day by the middle of next month, unless there is a significant reduction in contact between residents.

Ontario reported 2,903 new cases and 41 more deaths linked to the novel coronavirus on Tuesday.

Across Canada, the figures rose to more than 673,000 infections and nearly 17,200 deaths.

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