

Canada's largest province keeps ban on outdoor recreation

May 13 2021, by Rob Gillies



A closed Lakeview Golf Course facility is shown during the COVID-19 pandemic in Mississauga, Ontario, on Wednesday, May 12, 2021. The Ontario government has deemed golf courses and other outdoor recreational sports unsafe to open at this current time. (Nathan Denette/The Canadian Press via AP)

Ontario's premier is keeping outdoor recreational activities like golf courses closed for at least two more weeks despite calls by health officials to resume them for physical and mental health.

Premier Doug Ford on Thursday extended what he calls a "stay-at-home" order for Canada's largest province until at least June 2.

Retail stores are open for curbside pickup and highways and roads are busy, but restaurants—including outdoor patios—are closed, as are in-class schooling and gyms. Most nonessential workers are working from home amid a third wave of coronavirus infections fueled by variants.

The Ontario Medical Association released a statement this week stressing the importance of outdoor recreational facilities such as golf courses, tennis and basketball courts in improving physical and mental health. Golf Ontario started a campaign called "LetUsPlay." Ontario is the only jurisdiction in North America where golf is not allowed.

"There's nothing wrong with golfing. The problem is the mobility, then after golf they have a few pops. That's the problem," Ford said.

But Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious disease scientist at the University of Toronto, said he's still frustrated about limiting outdoor activities.

"These are safe & should be encouraged," Bogoch tweeted.



Workers trim trees at a closed Lakeview Golf Course during the COVID-19 pandemic in Mississauga, Ontario, on Wednesday, May 12, 2021. The Ontario government has deemed golf courses and other outdoor recreational sports unsafe to open at this current time. (Nathan Denette/The Canadian Press via AP)

Dr. Andrew Morris, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Toronto, agreed.

"I think everyone shares these sentiments: 1 Don't open up yet—get numbers down and vaccines in arms 2. Open up outdoors," Morris tweeted.

Backlash from police, health experts and the public last month prompted

Ford to retract restrictions that closed playgrounds and allowed police to require anyone not at home to explain why they're out.

Vaccinations have ramped up in Canada, with at least 50% of eligible adults in Toronto having received at least one dose. The province expects 65% of those eligible in Ontario to have at least one dose by the end of the month.

Ford said infection numbers are slowly trending in the right direction and said the goal is for Ontario to have "the most normal July and August as possible." Ontario reported more than 2,700 cases on Thursday.

"We just can't open up too quickly," Ford said.

Ford earlier had tried to open up activities despite warnings from health experts, and then quickly closed things back down as infections spiked.

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