

October 24, 2020

Dr. David Williams
Chief Medical Officer of Health
393 University Ave., 21st Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2M2

Dear Dr. Williams,

Throughout the pandemic governments and public health agencies at all levels, have worked together to protect the health and safety of Ontarians and Canadians.

For months, public health officials in Ontario and around the world have emphasized two key matrix in determining our success in fighting COVID-19: virus spread (including the number, type and setting of outbreaks) and health system capacity.

Considering the rate of virus spread over the past two weeks, Halton Region has averaged approximately 30 new cases per day -- and just 16 new cases yesterday. In terms of hospitalization rates our numbers are low. Yesterday, Halton Region reported just 1 hospitalization in Burlington and Georgetown, 3 cases in Oakville and 5 cases in Milton. The Milton cases are directly related to a long-term care facility. To give some perspective, Burlington's Joseph Brant Hospital currently has 91 surge beds available. In short, our rate of infection is declining (well below the provincial average), and we have significant hospital capacity.

Last week when York Region faced new restrictions, Halton Region came together. We acted quickly to implement several recommendations made by our Medical Officer of Health. Measures were enacted to restrict the use of municipal recreational facilities for organized sports and fitness classes. We also asked residents from identified hotspots to avoid non-essential travel to Halton Region. These measures are working.

In June, when we began to emerge from the lockdown, the advice given by our medical experts was to wait two weeks (the incubation period), before lifting any restrictions. When taken together with our decreasing case counts, there is no evidence to suggest that moving Halton to a modified Phase 2 will have any meaningful impact on reducing case counts. One thing that is certain, is that many people and businesses can not financially withstand another shutdown.

When York Region was moved back to a modified stage 2, you said that, "their positivity rate had moved past public health's 'high alert' range of 2.5 percent." This is not the case in Halton Region.

Earlier this week, during the daily media briefing on Monday, you mentioned that there was "evidence of plateauing" with COVID-19 cases. This is certainly welcome news, yet at the same time creates some confusion. Even with our numbers continuing to decline, we understand that Halton's Medical Officer of Health is pushing to move Halton Region back to phase 2 next week, in line with Peel, Toronto, York and Ottawa.

During the height of COVID-19, the majority of Ontarians accepted unprecedented restrictions in order to stop the spread and flatten the curve. Now, nearly 7 months later the public is demanding more than just the blanket statement of "on the advice of medical experts." In fact, without providing specific justification for implementing new restrictions, there is legitimate concern that people will start to ignore public health advice.

Over the past several weeks, we have all heard from constituents across Halton Region. They've told us they want public health and our levels of government to follow the data, and be transparent and accountable. Instead of imposing blanket measures, Halton residents are asking that we target activities and locations that pose the highest risk of transmission, including limiting non-essential travel outside of identified hotspots.

In these unprecedented times, individuals and businesses need to have some level of predictability and stability. This is why we are also calling on you to clearly define the criteria used to determine when further restrictions or rollbacks are required, as well as the criteria that must be met for lifting any restrictions or rollbacks.

Please know that we appreciate your tireless efforts on behalf of all Ontarians, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jane McKenna, MPP
Burlington



Parm Gill, MPP
Milton



Gary Carr, Chair
Halton Region



Marianne Meed Ward, Mayor
City of Burlington



Gordon Krantz, Mayor
Town of Milton

JM: ka

cc: Premier Doug Ford
cc: Hon. Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
cc: Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health (Acting)
cc: Dr. Fiona Kouyoumdjian, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health
cc: Dr. Hamidah Meghani, Medical Officer of Health (Halton Region)