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'A BOMBSHELL' Canadians stuck in U.K. after Canada shuts air travel due to new strain of COVID-19 // B1

Ontario

Premier Doug Ford said

COVID-19 is spreading rapidly from

areas with a high number of cases to

those with fewer cases,

and the province

needs to preserve

capacity in its

health-care system.

Uhe Standard **DECEMBER 22, 2020** SERVING ST. CATHARINES AND NIAGARA SINCE 1891



NATHAN DENETTE THE CANADIAN PRESS

Ontario begins lockdown Dec. 26

Province aiming to bring soaring COVID-19 infections under control

SHAWN JEFFORDS THE CANADIAN PRESS

Ontario will go into lockdown on Boxing Day in an effort to bring soaring COVID-19 cases under control, a move the province announced Monday after health advisers said thousands of infections could be avoided if tough restrictions were imposed earlier.

The lockdown will shutter all non-essential businesses, ban indoor gatherings, close restaurant dining rooms, and see all schools move classes online for the first week of the new year. It also means Ontarians are advised to stay home as much as possible.

place for southern Ontario un- could be prevented.

til Jan. 23, but will lift for northern Ontario - where there are fewer cases — on Jan. 9.

Premier Doug Ford said the virus is spreading rapidly from areas with a high number of cases to those with fewer cases, and the province needs to preserve capacity in its health-care

"This difficult action is without a doubt necessary to save lives and prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed in the coming weeks," he said.

"Make no mistake, thousands of lives are at stake right now."

Hours earlier, the province's health advisers said the sooner a "hard lockdown" was imple-The restrictions will remain in mented, the more new cases

"If we started on Dec. 21, instead of Dec. 28, it plays out significant reductions in cases under almost any scenario," said Dr. Adalsteinn Brown, cochair of the province's CO-VID-19 science advisory table.

Brown added that anything less than a four-week lockdown will not work, based on the experience of other jurisdictions.

Ford defended the decision to wait until Dec. 26 to impose the restrictions, noting that hot spots are already in lockdown.

"We want to give the same opportunities to businesses that haven't experienced lockdown before ... (and) give them the opportunity to get ready to hunker down," he said.

Toronto, Peel Region, York Region, Windsor-Essex, and Hamilton are already in lockdown.

Dr. Naveed Mohammad, CEO of the William Osler Health LOCKDOWN continued on A2

System that operates hospitals in Peel Region, said people needed to act as if the lockdown started immediately.

"Until the people of this province realize what each trip out of their home risks for themselves and their loved ones, we won't get through this," he said, noting that hospitals in Brampton are grappling with capacity issues.

"Please stay home, starting today."

The Ontario Hospital Association, which had called for strict new restrictions, said it was disappointed the lockdown wouldn't take effect sooner.

"The Dec. 26 implementation date sends a confusing message about what (residents) should and shouldn't do at this crucial moment," said CEO Anthony Dale.

Delay of provincial lockdown concerns Dr. Hirji

Health official fears shoppers from GTA will flock to Niagara stores

GORD HOWARD THE ST. CATHARINES STANDARD

The right call at the wrong time that's how Dr. Mustafa Hirji

describes Premier Doug Ford's decision Monday to put all of Ontario into full lockdown starting Boxing Day.

Ontario is "absolutely at a level where we needed something dramatic to happen," said Hirji, Niagara's acting medical officer of health.

But it's the delay that bothers

"Where I would say we are definitely too late is that the announcement is (Monday), but it doesn't kick in until Saturday ... If we decide that we need to do this, we need to be doing it tonight basically."

His department tracks local cases "pretty much every day" that are linked to people from the Toronto and Peel areas. which have been in lockdown for weeks.

Announcing Monday that a lockdown will start Saturday "is basically signalling to everybody, for four days you need to rush and come here to do your shopping before the lockdown happens."

In making the announcement, Ford cited the "extremely serious" risk of growing caseloads across the province overwhelming the health-care sys-

For Niagara especially, it marks a head-spinning ascent through levels of restriction: On

COVID-19 continued on A2

Firefighter rescues woman from Twelve Mile Creek

Andreas Fortis was off duty when he and bystanders raced to help

ALLAN BENNER

THE ST. CATHARINES STANDARD

Andreas Fortis had just finished working a heart-wrenching shift as a firefighter in Brampton early Thursday morning when he found himself thrust into a rescue operation.

After returning to his St. Catharines

home and driving his children to school, he was heading to a gym to work out shortly after 9 a.m.

That's when he saw a young woman sitting on the railing of the bridge that carries Fourth Avenue over Twelve Mile Creek.

Fortis turned around and headed back to the woman. He was one of several people who had stopped to help the woman.

But before anyone could reach her, she fell backwards into the frigid rapids below.

Fortis raced back to his vehicle, and drove down Welland Vale Road to the creek bank, planning to do anything he could to pull the woman to safety.



BOB TYMCZYSZYN TORSTAR

Firefighter Andreas Fortis was near the rapids by the Welland Vale Bridge Thursday when he went into the water to rescue a person.

He was determined.

"I just got off shift when we had a young girl hang herself. We just had a young girl's suicide literally hours before this."

After being unable to help that girl RESCUE continued on A2

in Brampton a few hours earlier, Fortis wasn't going to lose another.

"Not today," he thought. Fortis, 38, wasn't only in the right



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Sunday evening Pick 2:00 Pick 3: 979 Pick 4: 9363 Encore: 2421046 Keno: 1, 2, 8, 15, 17, 21, 25, 28, 32, 34, 35, 40, 44, 46, 51, 53, 54, 60, 62,63 Poker: 2-C, 3-S, 10-S, 7-C, 4-C. Mega Dice: 16, 21, 28, 34, 35, &

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COVID-19

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Sunday the region was in orange, on Monday it moved to red and on Saturday it goes to

The region's daily count of new cases spiked more than a week ago and hasn't slowed. Between Dec. 14 and 20, the number of new cases increased 66 per cent over the previous week. On Monday, Niagara had 82 new COVID-19 cases after reporting a record 218 over the weekend. There are 20 active outbreaks, including 11 in hospital or long-term-care settings, and 651 active cases. There have been at least 99 COVID-related deaths in Niagara since the pandemic began, according to Niagara Region Public Health.

The worst outbreak is at Oakwood Park Lodge long-termcare home in Niagara Falls.

According to the provincial government's website, 13 more staffers tested positive Monday, bringing the total of infected staff to 43.

Eighty-nine residents are also infected for a total of 132 cases. There have been six deaths.

Hirji acknowledged there have been "some discussions" about Niagara Health taking

WHAT GREY LOCKDOWN MEANS

Here are some of the new restrictions Niagara will face under the grey lockdown level.

RESTAURANTS AND BARS

Only takeout, drive-thru and delivery is permitted.

PUBLIC EVENTS

No indoor organized events and social gatherings are permitted, except with members of the same household. People who live alone including seniors can have exclusive close contact with members of another household.

Up to 10 people are permitted at outdoor public events, while religious services or ceremonies such as weddings and funerals are limited to 10 people indoors and 10 people outdoors.

SPORTS AND FITNESS

Both indoor and outdoor sports

over operation of Oakwood Park Lodge during the outbreak, as the hospital system did earlier at Millennium Trail Manor in Niagara Falls.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care would make that call, along with Niagara Health.

and recreational facilities are closed, with the exception of facilities used for day camps and child care. Outdoor recreational facilities such as rinks and trails are open with restrictions prohibiting team sports.

RETAIL

Most businesses open for curbside pickup or delivery, although some businesses that primarily sell food such as supermarkets and grocery stores as well as pharmacies can be open for in-store shopping at 50 per cent capacity.

Shops in retail outlet malls are open only for curbside pickup and delivery.

CASINOS, BINGO HALLS, CINEMAS, PERFORMING ARTS CENTRES

All facilities are closed.

But, Hirji said, "It's important to note that Niagara Health themselves are grappling with five outbreaks ... Niagara Health is probably fairly stretched trying to manage those outbreaks.

"It would be difficult for them to come in and add a sixth outbreak to their portfolio."

He said Oakwood Park is managing by bringing in staff from its owner's other locations and using temporary support staff.

"One thing we are seeing not just at Oakwood Park Lodge but at all of our outbreaks right now is that all of these options for staffing are pretty much depleted now," he said.

That illustrates the need for a drastic step like a provincewide

'We've maxed out what our health-care system is able to do with long-term-care homes, and hospitals are pretty close behind that," said Hirji.

While the lockdown will ban indoor dining in restaurants and force many retailers to offer curbside or delivery service only, Hirji said the greatest risk of virus spread isn't among shoppers.

Instead, he said, it's people gathering in small groups.

"It's really coming down to how all of us as individuals act during this time," he said, urging people to isolate at home, go out only when necessary and strictly limit their social contacts. "If we do that we will break a lot of chains of transmission and really get CO-VID-19 under control and be able to stay out of lockdown."

LOCKDOWN

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Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath also slammed Ford for delaying the start of the lockdown, accusing him of caving to pressure from big-box stores. She urged support for small businesses, workers who needed income support and those who may be facing eviction.

"This lockdown means more

people are facing the collapse of their business, the loss of their job, or financial hardship," she

Some, however, pushed back against the province's move.

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson said his city had been "blindsided" by news of the lockdown, noting that it had successfully brought its cases down.

"There are simply no facts to support a lockdown in the city of Ottawa," Watson said.

The lockdown means schools

across the province will move to online learning from Jan. 4 to Jan. 8, after which students will return to in-person learning depending on their location and grade level.

All students in northern Ontario and elementary students in southern Ontario will return to in-person learning on Jan. 11. High school students in southern Ontario will continue online learning until Jan. 25.

Child-care centres across the province will remain open.

The lockdown also means essential businesses that remain open will have strict capacity limits in place. Businesses like restaurants will close to indoor dining, but will be permitted to offer takeout and delivery. Indoor sports facilities, personal care services like salons, and casinos are all shut.

The province also announced it will create a grant program offering some small businesses a minimum of \$10,000 to help offset losses.

RESCUE

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place at the right time to save the woman. He was also uniquely qualified to do so.

"In Brampton, out of the 13 fire halls there's one tech rescue hall that does swift-water, ice water (rescues). All those things. I go to that hall. That's where I'm from," said Fortis.

Fortis was joined by several people who followed the woman's progress as she was swept downstream, looking for a location where entering the water to reach her would be less treacherous.

By the time he found a location free from debris, where the rapids weren't as strong, he jumped in and swam to the

woman as bystander Jeremy Bentley watched his progress from shore and guided him to

"I grabbed her and I could tell she was still breathing," Fortis said. The woman was conscious at

the time, and although she muttered she was unable to speak due to hypothermia. "I swam backwards with her.

When my leg touched the bottom (of the creek) again, I knew it worked," Fortis said. "I couldn't believe the feeling. We got her back and she was alive. All this worked. It was crazy."

Fortis didn't think about the frigid water as adrenalin pumped through his veins while he swam as hard as he could to reach the woman.

"I only felt the cold after she

was on the shore," he said. Fortis said emergency work-

ers rarely get to meet the people they help.

"Good or bad, did they make it. We never know," he said.

But that changed when he reached out to the family of the woman and had an opportunity to meet them face-to-face Sun-

"It was absolutely emotional," he said.

Fortis said the petite 22-yearold woman with brown hair and brown eyes who has since recovered from her ordeal had year, after moving here from Brazil.

"I guess she had some depression issues recently. She had been away from her family for a long time," he said. "Yesterday,

it was unreal."

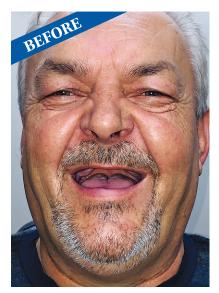
Fortis has since received phone calls from St. Catharines deputy fire chief Dave Upper, as well as Brampton fire Chief Bill Boyes, congratulating him on the rescue.

"I told my crew and my chief that I might have been there with people I didn't know, but my crew was there with me. The training, my crew, there always in my ears making sure we do things the right way to be

As word spread about Fortis's off-duty actions, he said he was been in Niagara for less than a the recipient of some good-natured teasing at work as his fellow firefighters began singing "Hero" by Enrique Iglesias.

"I'm just glad to be there," he said. "I don't think the hero label really fits."

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