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Ontario government must 'immediately' reopen outdoor spaces: Canadian Paediatric Society



By [Hannah Jackson](#) · Global News

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The Canadian Paediatric Society is calling on the Ontario provincial government to “immediately” reopen outdoor recreation spaces, saying the closure is having “devastating effects” on children and youth amid the [COVID-19](#) pandemic.

In an open letter posted to Twitter on Friday, the society said it “cannot overstate the extent of the mental health crisis facing our children and youth.”

"We cannot overstate the extent of the [#mentalhealth](#) crisis facing children and youth."

We call on [@ONgov](#) to:

- 1. Immediately re-open outdoor recreation spaces for kids**
- 2. Mobilize a plan to get students safely back in school [#KidsNeedSchool](#) [@fordnation](#) [@Sflecce](#) [@MacLeodLisa](#) pic.twitter.com/MuNYb6p9Ne**

— Canadian Paediatric Society ([@CanPaedSociety](#))

[May 7, 2021](#)

“Our clinics and hospitals are overrun with families seeking care for children and youth in distress — eating disorders, anxiety, hopelessness, depression, problematic substance use and more.”

The letter is addressed to Premier Doug Ford, Education Minister Stephen Lecce and Sport Minister Lisa McLeod.

READ MORE: [Ontario outdoor recreational facilities to stay closed until COVID-19 cases drop: minister](#)



640 Toronto

Ontario government must 'immediately' reope

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The ban on outdoor recreational facilities began in April, when the province imposed tighter restrictions and extended a stay-at-home order as new cases of the virus surged.

The paediatric society said it wrote the provincial government last month to express its concerns saying the measures would “further confine Ontario’s children and youth to their homes.”

3:40

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COVID-19: Toronto mayor Tory says city is taking steps to help ease pressure of provincewide lockdown – Apr 1, 2021

The province did allow playgrounds to reopen, but the Canadian Paediatric society said that's not enough.

“Although you reopened playgrounds, a range of spaces are still off-limits to children and youth, including soccer pitches, baseball diamonds and basketball courts,” the letter reads.

The letter says outdoor recreational spaces should immediately reopen, “unless (the government has) data showing these venues are sources of virus transmission.”

READ MORE: [Science suggests low risk of outdoor COVID-19 transmission.](#)
[Here's why](#)

What's more, experts have argued that the risk of COVID-19 transmission outdoors is much lower than during indoor activities.

“You know, you're taking away the safe options from people as you do nothing to impact the places where the disease is spreading at a time when our ICUs (intensive care units) are literally collapsing,” [Dr. David Fisman](#), a professor at the University of Toronto and member of Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, told Global News in a previous interview.

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Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious diseases faculty member at the University of Toronto echoed Fisman's remarks, saying closing recreational activities “does

not make sense.”



640 Toronto

'It's pretty clear we can do things outside very,

00:00 / 19:06

“Outdoor activities are vital for mental & physical health, especially with stay-at-home orders,” he wrote in a tweet after the announcement.

“Science is clear: Outdoor COVID transmission is extremely rare,” he said.

However, on Tuesday, [Ontario’s Health Minister Christine Elliot](#) said such facilities will remain closed until the province’s cases drop significantly.

“We need to limit our mobility as much as possible to reduce transmission and we are going to be assessing this,” she said during a press conference.

“But for right now we will need to continue with those measures in place to reduce mobility and reduce transmission.”

Ontario added 3,166 new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, pushing the provincial total to 486,223.

Twenty-three more fatalities were also recorded, meaning to date, 8,236 have died in the province after testing positive for COVID-19.

While the number of new cases has dropped since the peak in mid-April, as of Friday, the province was still reporting 3,265 new cases of the virus on average the last seven days.

Reopening schools

In the letter, the Canadian Paediatric Society also calls on the provincial government to “mobilize plans to safely re-open schools before the end of the 2020-21 year.”

On April 12, the Ford government announced students in the province would [move to virtual learning indefinitely](#) as the province struggled to contain the third wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Ontario students were originally supposed to return to in-person learning after taking a week off for their delayed March Break.

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COVID-19: Ontario families weigh in on remote learning – May 4, 2021

Lecce said the decision was “about prevention.”

“It is a proactive and sadly necessary precaution as we tackle the third wave of COVID-19,” he said during a press conference in April.

“This was not a decision we made lightly, as we know how critical schools are to Ontario students,” he continued. “Our priority has always been to keep schools open, however sharply rising community transmission can put our schools and Ontario families at risk.”

READ MORE: [COVID-19 has changed. Should our outdoor behaviour shift too?](#)

The paediatric society's letter is signed by Eddy Lau and Kimberly Dow, members of the Canadian Paediatric Society board, and the organization's vice-president Mark Feldman.

"Ontario's children and youth depend on all of us to protect them not just from COVID-19, but from the devastating effects of these public health measures," the letter reads.

"We urge you to place a higher priority on their mental health and well-being."

In an email to Global News on Saturday, a spokesperson for the province's health ministry said the stay-at-home order and enhanced public health measures introduced are "designed to reduce mobility and limit the risk of transmission in order to stabilize and protect our health care system."

"Our government will continue (to) act on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health who will review the science, data and trends along with collaborating with local medical officers of health and our team of expert health officials on if and when public health measures can be adjusted."

Ontario's education ministry, while on one hand, acknowledged "how important it is for children to be in school," in a letter emailed to Global News Saturday, a spokesperson for Minister Lecce also stressed upon the importance of the order.

"Ontario continues to face health challenges, with high rates of community-based transmission and intensive care units facing stress. That's why the province took action by extending the stay-at-home order and introducing public health measures, while continuing to call on the federal government to take action at our border to reduce transmission of variants in the community," the statement said.

The statement further said that the ministry’s “singular aim” is to “protect students, staff and families” and it is therefore “delivering a \$1.6B investment and historic mental health supports” as it continues to follow the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health going forward.

–With files from Global News’ Saba Aziz, Jessica Patton and The Canadian Press

Canadian cases

CONFIRMED

1,383,214

DEATHS

25,566

RECOVERED

1,326,484

VACCINATED

24,103,276

Source: Esri Canada

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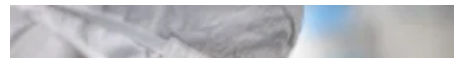


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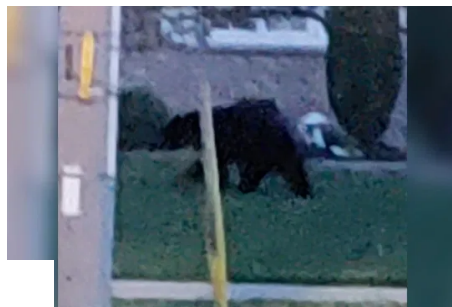
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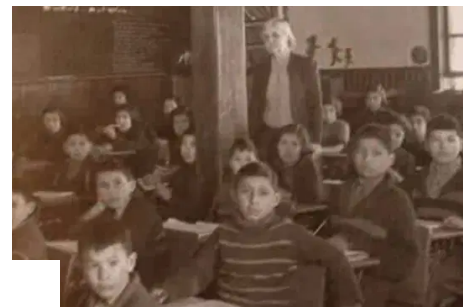


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