Alberta Announces The Easing Of Health Measures



On January 29, 2021, the Alberta Government introduced a four-step framework (the "**Framework**") to ease the mandatory health restrictions announced on December 8, 2020 based on certain COVID-19 hospitalization rates benchmarks reached in Alberta.

As Alberta currently has less than 600 COVID-19 hospitalizations, Alberta will enter Step 1 of the Framework on February 8, 2021. Under Step 1 the following changes will come into effect:

- All restaurants, pubs, bars, lounges and cafes can open for in-person service with the following restrictions:
  - in-person dining must close by 11:00 pm;
  - a maximum of six (6) people per table, each from the same household or the two (2) close contacts for people who live alone;
  - contact information must be collected from one person of the dining party;
  - liquor service must cease at 10:00 pm; and
  - no entertainment, such as VLTs, pool tables, and live music, is allowed.
- Children's sport and performance activities are permitted if related to school activities;
- K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions may use off-site facilities to support curriculum-related educational activities;
- One-on-one training is permitted for indoor fitness activities with the following restrictions:
  - sessions must be scheduled or by appointment;
  - sessions cannot interact with others and a minimum of three (3) metres distance must be maintained between sessions in the same facility;
  - trainers must be professional, certified, and/or paid trainers providing active instruction and correction;
  - trainers should remain masked during the session, but clients are not required to wear a mask while exercising; and
  - no circuit training is permitted with multiple trainers.

Additional Steps in the Framework

The Province will move to the next step in the Framework once the specific hospitalization benchmark is attained provided that there has been at least

three (3) weeks between the commencement of the current step and the proposed next step. This is intended to ensure the Province can assess the impact of easing of restrictions in each individual step and the Province has indicated that the lowest risk activities in each sector will be considered for change first.

Step 2 will occur when there are less than 450 COVID-19 hospitalizations and may include potential easing of restrictions in the following areas:

- retail;
- banquet halls, community halls, and conference centres;
- hotels; and
- further easing of indoor fitness and children’s sport and performance.

Step 3 will occur when there are less than 300 COVID-19 hospitalizations and may include potential easing of restrictions in the following areas:

- adult team sports;
- casinos, racing centres; and bingo halls;
- indoor social gatherings, with restrictions;
- indoor seated events;
- libraries;
- museums, art galleries, zoos, interpretive centres; and
- places of worship.

Step 4 will occur when there is less than 150 COVID-19 hospitalizations and may include potential easing of restrictions in the following areas:

- amusement parks;
- concerts (indoor);
- festivals (indoor and outdoor);
- funeral receptions;
- indoor entertainment centres and play centres;
- performance activities;
- sporting events;
- tradeshows, conferences, and exhibiting events;
- wedding ceremonies and receptions; and
- workplaces.

Gowling WLG focus

With the transition into Step 1 of Alberta’s Framework, many businesses will be able to expand services to the public and increase their activities. However, there continue to be ongoing protocols and limitations in relation to the step-by-step Framework. Further, given the fact that the Alberta Government is taking a staged approach to easing restrictions based on COVID-19 hospitalization numbers in the Province, there is no set timetable as to when subsequent stages of the Framework will commence and certainly no guarantee that the lifting or relaxing of restrictions will move in a sequential manner through the proposed steps.

by Zafar Jaffer , Krista Schofer , Melanie Condic , Simanpreet Panaych and Matthew Warren
Gowling WLG