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WHAT'S CONSIDERED 'INDOOR' DINING?

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Confusion around what constitutes "indoor" dining across Ontario under COVID-19 regulations may place extra burdens on struggling local businesses, while preventing new ways of slowing the virus's spread.

Despite no mention of individual outdoor dining globes, or domes, in the province's Reopening Ontario Act or regulations, and expert opinion that single-household dining enclosures are safer than dining inside a restaurant, the City of Hamilton is among Ontario municipalities interpreting the province's regulation as defining the globes as "indoor" dining.

The Act regulates tents covering an entire patio. Hamilton and some other municipalities apply the tent regulation to globes.

As a result, patrons using outdoor domes are counted among

See 'GLOBES', page 5



Dining domes, or globes, on the Collins Brewhouse patio were popular with customers for about a week - when the restaurant was informed they are considered "indoor" dining and will be included in the 10-person total of permitted indoor customers.

Emily Nichols photo


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'GLOBES' TREATED AS INDOOR DINING

Continued from page 3

limited indoor diners permitted.

For the Collins Brewhouse in Downtown Dundas, Hamilton's interpretation means a maximum total capacity of 10 diners in its five new "globes" on the patio and inside the restaurant - combined.

News of Hamilton's interpretation, came to Collins manager Jamie Leder about a week after most of their globes were being used, in addition to a maximum of 10 diners indoors.

"It doesn't really make a whole heck of a lot of sense," Leder said. "It's like being in your car with your family, or at your own dining room table. It's your own environment."

He said Collins servers do not enter the domes while patrons are inside, but serve through vents in the side.

Between seatings he uses a leaf blower to circulate air, cleans and sterilizes the globe.

He said the restaurant was trying to come up with new ideas to offer safe experiences. It's invested more than \$10,000 in the domes.

"We're just trying to find ways to keep people

employed, keep the lights on and offer people something unique to do," Leder said.

He thinks there should be a level playing field across the province, without each municipality trying to interpret regulations that don't address the globes.

Leder said the Collins is following all local public health rules and provincial regulations. He noted the restaurant has been cautious during the pandemic - even delaying opening indoor dining when it was allowed, in favour of safer outdoor dining on the patio.

McMaster University associate professor of medicine and infectious disease expert Dominik Mertz said a contained space - such as the globe or dome - with members of one household "certainly increases safety as compared to having people share one large tent, or dining indoors."

"Such an approach would make it impossible for the virus to spread from one globe to the next, and as such from one household to the next," Mertz said.

He said the only risk that remains is for, and from, any server that

would enter the airspace of the globe. That issue is addressed at the Collins by serving through one of the globe's vents.

Mertz noted restaurant servers wear personal protective equipment comparable to what is used in hospital to care for COVID-19 patients.

"These domes would make sense - as long as only single households that are sharing their airspace at home as well as within one dome," Mertz said.

Hamilton, Waterloo Region and City of Guelph all consider the globes indoor dining. The City of London considers them outdoor dining.

Durham Region and Ottawa had no policy on them. Toronto has no policy because it is in lockdown. Halton Region public health recommends residents stay home except for essential trips.

Orest Katolyk, chief municipal law enforcement officer in London, said: "it is our interpretation that if these domes or bubbles are located on the outdoor patio area, they would be included in the outdoor capacity and not considered indoor dining."

Public Health Ontario published a Rapid Review of outdoor dining domes and COVID-19.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: We heard about the Collins Brewhouse's challenges with outdoor dining globes being considered indoor dining and wanted to learn more.

OUTDOOR RINK OPENING WITH LIMITS, RESERVATIONS

TOTAL OF 25 USERS PERMITTED DURING PRE-BOOKED 50-MINUTE BLOCKS OF TIME

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Dundas Driving Park's Rotary Club outdoor skating rink is anticipated to open this month, with a new hourly reservation system and a limit on skaters.

If everything goes according to plan, the Dundas rink, along with others across the City of Hamilton, will open on Saturday, Dec. 19.

Local residents will book required free reservations on the City of Hamilton website (www.hamilton.ca/winter). A total of 25 people are allowed on the ice during each 50-minute block of time.

After 50 minutes, all users must leave the ice so that the facility can be cleaned before the next block of time. Users can reserve back-to-back blocks, if spaces are available, but still must leave the ice for 10 minutes in each block.

Healthy and safe com-



Barry Gray/Hamilton Spectator

The Dundas Rotary Club outdoor skating rink in Dundas Driving Park is expected to reopen on December 19 with new COVID-19 regulations, including a 25-person limit and a reservation system.

munities general manager Paul Johnson told the city's General Issues Committee on Dec. 9 that city employees will staff the rink during operating hours to ensure the reservation system, maximum number and other COVID-19 protocols are followed.

The rink's official, staffed operating hours will be 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week.

After hours, Johnson does anticipate people using the unfenced and unstaffed rink, but encouraged area residents to notify the city with any concerns and to contact the police if gatherings at the

rink get out of hand.

The city is trying to promote outdoor activities this winter, in the face of cancellations or limits on indoor activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We need to get people outside and recreating," Johnson said.

More information on outdoor winter activities, including details about local neighbourhood ice rinks, is available on the city's winter activities website.

Johnson said the plan is contingent on Hamilton staying in the "red" COVID-19 zone, and not being locked down by the province.

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