

# Businesses Fear Return To Red Phase: Chamber CEO

Saint John, NB, Canada / The Wave

[Ben Burnett](#)

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Image: Mark Leger/Huddle.

With Public Health moving the Saint John health region back to the orange phase of pandemic recovery, the CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce says many in the business community fear the ramifications of further shutdowns.

The COVID-19 outbreak has included several possible coronavirus exposure notifications at Saint John-area bars and restaurants, prompting many business owners to take go beyond provincial recommendations and temporarily close.

Chamber CEO David Duplisea estimates that by the time the pandemic is over, 30 per cent of Saint John's local businesses will have closed up shop for good.

He says Saint John's return to the orange phase serves as a reminder to businesses to strictly follow provincial guidelines. He believes businesses are concerned that if they aren't proactive, the region could wind up back in the red zone, forcing a second round of business shutdowns.

"We keep our fingers crossed the spread isn't going to happen and we won't be going to red," Duplisea said. "But we don't know and we won't know for 10-14 days what the ramifications for last weekend were."

Vito's closed all three of its locations after a staff member at the Rothesay Avenue location tested positive. Other establishments like the Saint John Ale House have chosen to temporarily close despite not having announced any exposure to the virus.

Duplisea says it's a positive step to see restaurants put public health and safety at the forefront. He says it's a sign of business owners taking responsibility, but also likely a note of caution given what little information we have about current contact tracing operations.

"Businesses are choosing to say 'we may have had someone from that group come into our bar, so we are going to err on the side of caution,'" said Duplisea.



He says losing a significant part of local businesses will be felt particularly strongly in smaller cities like Saint John.

“Everybody knows everybody else, we’re one degree of separation and I think the impacts will be felt a little bit more personally in our region ... We’re all connected in some way, a small ecosystem.”

Despite the significant toll he foresees on the local business community, Duplisea says many business owners are getting creative and finding new ways to stay afloat.

“The Christmas season is their big season, and they’re going to adapt however they can in order to stay open,” he said. “We’re seeing businesses that have delivery models, they’re having promotions. We’re going to see even more of that now. We just went orange on Friday, so a lot of people will have spent the weekend thinking what this will mean for their business. I think we’re going to see them pivot and adapt.”

For his part, Duplisea asks that everyone continues to follow provincial COVID-19 guidelines, in order to get back into the yellow phase as quickly as possible.

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