

January 31, 2020

Statement from Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health:

This afternoon, a third case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was confirmed in a patient in London, Ontario. We have a very mobile population, with a lot of travel between Canada and China, so it is not surprising to learn of this news today. Local public health officials in London are following up directly on their case. This news does not change our situation in Toronto as we have no new cases here in our city. I will let you know directly if this changes. I want to remind Toronto residents that, at this time, the risk to our community remains low.

At present, there are only two confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV in Toronto. My staff are following up directly to connect with these two individuals through daily phone calls while they remain at home in isolation. We are monitoring their symptoms and we will clear the two individuals as non-infectious when two tests, taken 24 hours apart, show that these individuals no longer have any virus.

I have received questions from the media regarding isolation and quarantine. To clarify, “quarantine” refers to the practice of isolating individuals who may have been exposed to an infectious disease but do not have symptoms of illness. At this time, the current, evidence-informed guidance for Ontario does not recommend the use of quarantine. However, my staff continue to call people who were on the same flight as our two local cases daily to confirm that they continue to be well and without symptoms. If these people were to develop symptoms, they would be isolated and receive treatment.

I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that we often use terms in public health like “cases” and “contact”, but I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to remember that these are people from our community that we are talking about. We need to respect their privacy and allow for their rest and recovery.

2019-nCoV is a new virus that was identified only about a month ago. The global health community continues to gather health evidence on this virus. As new, verified data emerges, my staff and our local, provincial, and federal partners adapt our approach to follow the best available evidence. We expect that the situation will continue to change as we learn more.

At times like this, misinformation spreads and this is not helpful. It creates unnecessary worry and stigma that is not acceptable. I urge you to continue to consult evidence-based, credible sources of information.

Our Novel Coronavirus webpage and the Toronto Public Health Twitter account, twitter.com/@TOPublicHealth, are updated regularly with current information for Toronto residents and visitors. We also continue to operate our hotline for people with questions about this virus so they can connect with a health professional. I encourage people who have questions to contact us at 416-338-7600.

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