

**Update on COVID-19**  
**Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health**  
**March 12, 2020 at 2 p.m.**  
**Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.**

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- Good afternoon and welcome everyone. I would like to start by thanking the media here today for your continued efforts in helping us share the latest facts on COVID-19 as the situation evolves.
  - Thank you also Mayor Tory, Councillor Cressy, Chief Matt Pegg and our City colleagues joining me here to share an update on our COVID-19 response activities underway in Toronto.
  - I have been keeping you informed on COVID-19 since we learned of our first local case back in January. I've been updating you on our case and contact investigations, and providing you with advice on how to protect yourself from COVID-19.
  - My message to you has been to practice good infection prevention and control activities, such as vigilant hand washing, as an important way for you to do your part in delaying the onset of community spread.
  - My team continues to carefully monitor virus activity and transmission around the world to help inform our actions.
  - Yesterday, the World Health Organization characterized the current COVID-19 situation as a pandemic. This means COVID-19 is spreading across multiple continents, or worldwide.
  - Here in Toronto, what we have been seeing is an escalation of imported COVID-19 cases – cases that are related to travel outside of Canada, including the United States.

- At this time, we are still not seeing confirmed evidence of local transmission. However, it is important to also note that we are making decisions for a rapidly evolving situation based on the evidence that is available.
- With this in mind, I am making recommendations here today so that our community can also do their part to help minimize local transmission. I am asking you to listen carefully to this new advice.
- The new cases that we are seeing in our community are from people arriving in the city from outside of Canada, including the United States. For those of you who have travelled, we need you to be extremely vigilant and carefully monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of respiratory illness for 14 days after returning. Should symptoms develop, we ask that you stay home and contact public health for further instruction.
- We are also asking returning travellers to avoid group interactions and public gatherings, wherever possible. Travellers are also asked to avoid visiting with elderly people and those with chronic health conditions for the 14 day period. We ask this because this group is more sensitive to serious COVID-19 infection.
- COVID-19 spreads through the direct contact of the respiratory droplets, cough or sneeze, of someone who is infected with the virus. This usually happens when a person spends 15 minutes or more with an infected person within 6 feet.
- Event organizers and businesses can also help do their part in reducing this virus spread by promoting social distancing measures. The Public Health Agency of Canada recently published a resource that outlines risk considerations to help decide whether or not to postpone or cancel a gathering. So we are asking that if you have an upcoming event planned, please use this guidance to assess if your event can be postponed, or held virtually.

- For individuals, if you have been asked to self-isolate, or stay home if you are sick, I know this is difficult. This is why we are working with others to create supportive policies to make it easier for people to self-isolate or stay at home when they are sick.
- At this time, we are also asking you to change some behaviours such as avoiding hand-to-hand contact through shaking hands. Even though this is part of our business and social culture, we are asking that you adapt this behaviour to prevent the spread of this virus.
- People who have travelled in Italy, Iran or Hubei Province in China within the last 14 days, are to self-isolate and contact Toronto Public Health (TPH) within 24 hours of arriving in Toronto.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada also now recommends that Canadians avoid all cruise ship travel due to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.
- Locally, as of this morning, we are monitoring 29 positive cases of COVID-19. To date, there have been four other confirmed cases reported in Toronto. All four of these people have since recovered from their illness.
- When we are notified of potential COVID-19 cases, we carefully assess the potential health risk of each individual situation. We then provide education and further instructions to reduce the potential of virus spread.
- We continue to receive many questions about potential COVID-19 exposures and I therefore want to clarify that being in close contact with someone who does not have COVID-19, but was exposed to someone with COVID-19, does not require specific public health follow up.
- My team is carefully monitoring for cases and we continue to expand our public health operations as our local situation changes.
- We are also actively working with our City and health partners to plan for the potential of local spread, and we expect it will eventually occur.

- We in public health, along with our community, all have a role to play in managing this situation and delaying community spread for as long as possible.
- As always, staying informed with credible information sources is also very helpful. In recent weeks, I have seen people making good decisions in response to their activities and I am asking that you continue taking this very responsible approach.
- These measures may seem simple, but they are actually very powerful actions people can take to protect their health and that of others. They can help us to together delay the onset of community spread and decrease the impact of COVID-19 on our community at large.
- We will keep people updated as new facts are confirmed. In the meantime, I encourage you to continue to stay informed by regularly reviewing evidence-based, credible sources of information about this situation. I will now turn it back to Chief Matt Pegg. Thank you.