

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
April 6, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.
Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- As of 1 p.m. today there are 1,301 cases of COVID-19 in Toronto. This includes 1,078 confirmed cases and 223 probable ones. There are 145 cases hospitalized, and there are 60 in intensive care units.
- Sadly, there has been a total of 32 deaths from COVID-19 in Toronto. I extend my sincerest condolences to the families and friends of all individuals who have died from COVID-19 in our community.
- I have received a lot of questions regarding the COVID-19 situation in our local long-term care homes. As I have shared before, COVID-19 is most severe and often tragically fatal for our most vulnerable residents in our community.
- I reported earlier that we have started to witness serious outbreaks in our local long-term care and retirement homes. Currently, there are 135 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our long-term care and retirement homes settings and there have been 15 deaths.
- Understandably many of you are wondering if you should remove your loved ones from a long-term care facility or retirement home for the duration of the outbreak. There is no easy answer for this very complex question.
- Typically, people in long-term care homes are receiving specialized care that is not possible, or at best challenging to be provided in a home setting. Residents of long-term care facilities are often frail, with many complex underlying health issues, and equally complex care needs.
- These people are our parents, our grandparents and our other loved ones and it is precisely why their families have made the difficult choice to move them into these facilities in the first place: to make sure they are in a safe and supportive environment that provides onsite 24-hour medical, nursing and other support.

- Long-term care homes are expected to have protocols in place to prevent and minimize the spread of infectious disease. In the case of COVID-19, we have put even stricter protocols in place to keep long-term care residents safe.
- Part of our core work in public health is working with long-term care homes to ensure proper measures are in place to control outbreaks and prevent disease spread. For COVID-19, this means:
 - Staff in long-term care homes are directed to only work in one setting to prevent further virus spread.
 - Staff are screened for symptoms of illness when they enter the building and when they leave their shift.
 - All residents in the building are monitored closely, with twice daily checks for any new onset of COVID-19 symptoms. If a resident has these symptoms, they are immediately isolated where possible and tested.
 - There is reinforced physical distancing and increased handwashing has also been in place for everyone in all long-term care homes since we first learned of COVID-19.
 - Visitors are no longer permitted in these facilities to further protect against the inadvertent introduction of COVID19 in these homes.
 - All residents in a unit with a COVID-19 case are put in room isolation to prevent further virus spread. They receive their meals in their rooms, and staff wear protective equipment.
- We continue to work very hard behind the scenes to find solutions to these complex matters affecting our most vulnerable. This also includes connecting with our provincial colleagues to update guidelines, secure more protective equipment for staff, and support staffing issues.
- Ultimately, the decision to remove your loved one from a long-term care home or a retirement home is a personal decision. I would advise anyone considering this step to speak with the long-term care director at the home to inform your decision and to understand the specific daily care needs of your loved one.
- I understand it is difficult and worrisome to not be able to visit our loved-ones during this time. Many people are in this situation and they have come up with creative ways to stay connected at this time.

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- I've heard examples of thoughtful gestures that people are taking to connect with their loved ones at this difficult time. Some ideas include sending your loved ones books, so you can read the same one together from apart and discuss it over the phone.
- Many others are speaking with their loved ones daily through video calls, or sending emails for staff to read to their family members.
- There are many ways to stay in touch. Staff in long-term care homes and retirement residences are deeply committed to the wellbeing of their residents. I know they will do what they can to help you stay connected.
- I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every person working in a long-term care facility or retirement home for caring for our loved ones. They are responding courageously during this unprecedented time. They all deserve our respect and support.
- And to everyone in Toronto – to keep our most vulnerable safe, we need to keep the staff who care for them safe and healthy. This is why it is so important for as many of us as possible to stay home. This is the only way we will reduce the spread of this virus in our community so that we can protect our essential workers and minimize the loss of life.
- Please stay home, stay safe and take care of each other.

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