

Update on COVID-19

Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health

April 29, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.

Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory. For today's update, as of 11 a.m., there are 5,360 people infected with COVID-19 in Toronto. This includes 4,845 confirmed cases and 515 probable ones. There are 354 people in hospital and 111 in intensive care. In total, we have lost 347 Torontonians to this virus. On behalf of my team, I extend my deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones, and wish a speedy recovery to those who are sick.
- I remain concerned about the devastating impact COVID-19 is having on our community and our most vulnerable residents, and in particular people who are experiencing homelessness. Today, the City's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration announced a new program to provide interim housing for up to six months and other supports for people experiencing homelessness. This is welcome news.
- Affordable, quality and stable housing is important for good health and overall well-being. People who enjoy stable housing conditions with supports that are appropriate for their needs are best positioned to lead their healthiest, happiest, and most productive lives. Housing instability is associated with a range of poor mental and physical health outcomes.
- Improving health status and reducing health inequities are two of our main objectives in public health. One of the most powerful ways we can achieve these objectives is by ensuring stable housing for all of our residents. This is why, as your Medical Officer of Health, ending homelessness in our city is one of my top priorities in our city.
- We are currently facing many challenging circumstances. At times like this, I think it is important to always remember that even when things feel overwhelming, there is always hope. We see this hope reflected in many ways including the creative leadership demonstrated by some key organizations in our city.

- For example, the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board are known for creating exciting new learning opportunities for their students. While schools may be closed, the important business of learning is still open.

- Our local school boards are modelling the way by practicing truly inspiring examples of physically distanced learning for their students and school communities. I have heard of so many powerful examples, and while it is difficult to name just a few, some examples that stood out for me include:
 - Online music classes and virtual singalongs so that students can join each other in song, live on video;
 - Art, video and writing projects so students can thank frontline workers for keeping them safe, and share positive messages;
 - Holding student trustee elections online and providing opportunities for students to participate in leadership roles in their school communities;
 - An online weekly math challenge so students can tackle new math skills and share their math strategies with each other;
 - Offering daily reflections for students online;
 - A virtual spirit day so students can show their school pride by dressing in school colours and sharing photos; and
 - Donation drives providing food for people in need.

- In addition, many teachers are getting creative in showing their students that they care. For example:
 - Sending virtual birthday wishes;
 - Setting up neighbourhood reading buddies so that students can read books together over their backyard fences while maintaining a safe physical distance; and
 - A gym teacher cycling around the neighbourhood dressed as the school mascot, encouraging students and their families to stay physically active.

- These are just a few examples of positive leadership in extremely difficult times. Sincere thanks to the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board, and the many others who are finding ways to stay connected, while practising physical distancing. Your actions are reducing the spread of COVID-19 and saving lives in our city. I encourage you to find inspiration in these positive examples, so that we can all lead the way for our children and our city. In the meantime, please continue to stay home, stay safe and take care of each other.

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