

Update on COVID-19

Chief Pegg, Fire Chief & General Manager of Emergency Management

April 01, 2020 at 10 a.m.

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

Thank you Mayor Tory and Dr. de Villa.

The City of Toronto has been working proactively on the planning for, and response to, COVID-19 since mid-January: before there were any reported cases of COVID-19 in Canada.

The City of Toronto's Emergency Plan provides a robust framework for emergency management that is both scalable and agile. We are well equipped to respond to all aspects of complex emergencies, as they occur.

From the initial onset of COVID-19 in Toronto, we have built, and continue to operate, an incident management system that enables the City to make timely, effective and balanced decisions. The foundation for our incident management system is the establishment of the overarching strategic priorities for the emergency incident.

This is the process that is employed at thousands of fires and other emergencies every year in Toronto, and is the same process that is in place for COVID-19.

There are three overarching, strategic priorities that guide every decision we make in the Emergency Operations Centre, in response to COVID-19:

The first priority is to save lives and to prevent as many people as possible from becoming ill from COVID-19.

This is our top priority in all that we do.

The second priority is to do everything that we can, to prevent our healthcare system from becoming overwhelmed.

Our third priority is to do all that we can, to protect Toronto's economy and to limit the impacts associated with the response to COVID-19.

Each and every decision that the City of Toronto makes, in response to COVID-19, is made with the intention of meeting our overarching priorities of saving lives, protecting our healthcare system and protecting our economy.

Dr. de Villa, and the Toronto Public Health team, provide the City of Toronto and our Emergency Operations Centre with expert advice, guidance and recommendations to limit the spread of this terrible public health pandemic.

As the head of the City's Office of Emergency Management, it is my responsibility to ensure that we efficiently and effectively translate the advice and guidance of our Medical Officer of Health into plans and actions that, first and foremost, save lives.

Toronto has been out front of COVID-19 since before it arrived in Canada. We assembled the COVID-19 planning task force early and built strong and responsive plans. We have continued to remain abreast of this public health emergency as it developed, and have continued to respond with action plans that are based upon the very best expertise, advice and guidance.

And now, as Dr. de Villa advises us of the strong potential for rapid COVID-19 escalation in our City, we are responding in kind – with strong, balanced and focused action plans.

The actions being taken are not easy and will undoubtedly impact us all.

But they are necessary, if we are to save lives and avoid overwhelming our healthcare system with patients suffering from COVID-19 infections. Dr. de Villa has been very clear – we still have a window of opportunity to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in Toronto.

Our team will not stop until this is behind us and we have resumed being the busy, vibrant, strong and healthy city that we all love.

In response to the Medical Officer of Health's recommendations to scale up our response to COVID-19, in order to protect our most vulnerable:

The Emergency Operations Centre has developed detailed plans to provide:

- Food for those who need it, including those in isolation;
- Increased protection and support for those in long term care homes and retirement homes; and
- A rapid housing program to ensure that a room is available for everyone who needs one.

Over the past number of days, we have been working non-stop on the development of these comprehensive emergency plans.

The details and specifics of these plans will be made available publicly over the next few days.

I would like to thank Dr. de Villa and the Toronto Public Health team for their unwavering commitment to beating COVID-19. Both Mayor Tory and Toronto City Council have been clear from the outset – the City of Toronto will take every action necessary to beat COVID-19.

Today's actions are an important and critical step that will save lives, protect our healthcare system and protect our economy.

Thank you.