

Update on COVID-19

Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health

April 14, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.

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

- As of 12:30 p.m. today there are 2,543 cases of COVID-19 in Toronto. This includes 2,257 confirmed cases and 286 probable ones. There are 223 people hospitalized, and there are 90 people in intensive care units.
- There are currently 38 active outbreaks in our long-term care homes and 14 in local retirement homes. I am sad to report that there have been 68 confirmed COVID-19 deaths in our long-term care homes and 1 confirmed COVID-19 death in a local retirement home. In total, 115 people have died of COVID-19 in our community. Please join me in offering our condolences to everyone in our community who has lost a loved one to COVID-19 during this very difficult time.
- While I completely appreciate the desire to know details about individual cases, our focus needs to be on managing our local outbreak response and protecting the privacy of these individual and their families during this difficult time.
- At this time, we are not providing detailed data on cases per facility. These numbers are constantly changing as situations evolve, often many times daily.
- I have received many questions about long-term care and our role in keeping the residents safe during this pandemic. I am very concerned about the devastating impacts of COVID-19 that we are seeing in our long-term care homes that are affecting our loved ones in our community. Given the complexity of this sector, I think it is worth a quick overview of how it operates.
- Long-term care homes are part of the province's health care system. To qualify to live in a long-term care home, residents must have significant health needs and require help with most daily activities. This means that residents of long-term care are among the most frail and vulnerable in our community.

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- In Ontario, the Ministry of Long-term Care regulates, inspects and sets out accommodation fees for all long-term care homes.
- Long-term care homes are either managed and operated by the municipality, the private sector or a not-for-profit organization. In Toronto we have 10 run by the city and many others run by private and non-profit operators.
- The health and safety of the home's residents falls under the purview of the home. My team works closely with all long-term care and retirement homes in the city to implement infection prevention and control best practices to proactively prevent and control outbreaks.
- Under the Health Protection and Promotion Act all licenced healthcare institutions including long-term care homes and retirement homes, are required to report outbreaks to their local public health department.
- We at local public health investigate all reports of suspected and confirmed outbreak, and assist facilities in implementing appropriate infection control measure to diminish the severity and length of any outbreak that they experience.
- COVID-19 is a reportable disease under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, so individual lab confirmed cases are also specifically reportable to local public health. For COVID-19 we have been working with long-term care and retirement homes to implement a number of infection prevention and outbreak measures that include:
 - Initiating twice a day screening of residents and staff to monitor for COVID-19 symptoms and catch new infections as early as possible.
 - Implementing physical distancing measures and cancelling all group activities.
 - Enhancing cleaning particularly for frequently touched surfaces.
 - Ensuring that personal protective equipment is used appropriately to minimize health risks.

- In addition, on March 22, a provincial directive for long-term care homes from the Chief Medical Officer of Health advised all long-term care homes in Ontario that: "wherever possible, employers should work with employees to limit the number of work locations that employees are working at, to minimize risk to patients of exposure to COVID-19." This will be further strengthened in the form of an order as announced today by the Premier. Staff working at any of the 10 long-term care homes run by the City have been asked to choose the City as their primary employer thus limiting work locations among staff and minimizing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the City-run homes. To make this an easier choice for employees, the City has offered additional hours of work and overtime.
- The staff working in long-term care homes are critical to keeping our loved ones safe. To do this they need to stay healthy. We need to protect them and our best line of defense is to reduce community transmission: stay at home as much as possible and, when you do go out, practise physical distancing.
- Lastly, I wanted to share that the Ministry of Health recently expanded the COVID-19 test criteria in long-term care homes to increase testing during outbreaks. This means that our COVID-19 numbers within long-term care homes will go up and while this may appear to be concerning, it is a good thing because it helps us to identify COVID-19 cases sooner, and better guide our outbreak control measures in these vulnerable settings.
- In closing I also want to take this opportunity to thank each and every person working in any long-term care home or retirement home for caring for our loved ones. They are responding courageously during this unprecedented time and they deserve our respect, support, and gratitude.
- We all have an important role to play in protecting ourselves, our loved ones and our broader community from COVID-19. I sincerely thank everyone who is adhering to our physical distancing recommendations at this critical time. Please, stay home, stay safe and take care of each other.