

Update on COVID-19

Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health

April 16, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.

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

- By way of update, as of 12:30 p.m. today there are 2,881 cases of COVID-19 in Toronto. This includes 2,559 confirmed cases and 322 probable ones. There are 230 cases hospitalized, and there are 88 in intensive care units. In total 147 people have died of COVID-19 in our community.
- Please join me as I extend my sincerest condolences to the families and friends of all individuals who have died from COVID-19 in our community, and wish a speedy recovery to all of those who are ill.
- We realize that everyone is worried about COVID-19, and I am too. I also know that you want more information about how this new virus spreads and how it is impacting our city and our loved ones. As I shared during yesterday's media briefing, I hear you and appreciate your interest in these emerging details.
- My team is working beyond maximum capacity each and every day on our response to this issue and to make more timely COVID-19 data available to you. We are doing this alongside our intense efforts to respond to the evolving global COVID-19 emergency.
- Data is core to our work in public health. It helps us to understand infectious diseases, inform strategies to respond to complex issues, and actions to protect our health.
- Case and contact tracing reports provide us with some of these essential details to help us limit the spread of this virus. This information gives us insight into how a virus is transmitted from one person to another, how easily it may spread, how long it can incubate for and how it can impact our health.
- Other important data collected are symptoms, testing results, hospitalizations, deaths, and experiences in other jurisdictions. Analyzing data gives a better understanding and a clearer picture of this new virus, which helps to inform our public actions to protect your health.



Public Health

- We are living through an unprecedented global pandemic caused by a new virus that was unknown to us just 4 months ago.
- We must actively listen, and be nimble and diligent in applying our learning as we go. In the case of COVID-19, we have never seen this scale of contagion and impact – both on people who become very ill and on our health system. I have shared with you previously that we have been entering our COVID-19 case and contact tracing data into the provincial integrated public health information system that is known as iPHIS.
- iPHIS is a provincial information system that all local public health departments are required to use to report infectious disease information to the province. While iPHIS has served us for many years, for the purposes of the current COVID-19 emergency, we quickly realized that this provincial information system was not well equipped to deal with the scale of the data we need to quickly input.
- When we realized these limitations and that we needed more nimble technology for our response, we quickly worked with our city partners to develop a new information technology tool to keep up with our evolving contact tracing demands.
- I'm pleased to report today that our new information system, the Coronavirus Rapid Entry Case and Contact Management System, is live. This new web-based secure system allows our team to quickly and easily document each individual case investigation efficiently, and share data with the provincial Ministry of Health.
- It will allow us to better keep up with the volume of new reports, and prioritize individual cases that require urgent follow-up such as healthcare workers. Importantly, this system also allows more of our front-line staff to work remotely from home.
- While the system is for internal purposes and will not be available publicly, the information it generates will be used to share more detailed analysis with you. The new system was launched today and while we have done everything to support a smooth transition, we are prepared for potential technology transition hiccups that may occur.

- I would like to sincerely thank all of our city partners especially those from the technology services division for this unprecedented and innovative collaboration to respond to a significant need in an extremely timely manner. My team is very excited to work with this new technology solution that will improve and streamline our work.
- Lastly, I have been receiving many questions about the situation at our supervised consumption service located at the Works. In March, we made the difficult decision to temporarily close this critical health service. This was upsetting for all of us given the current overdose crisis which has persisted throughout this pandemic, and in fact in March 2020 we saw the highest number of suspected opioid overdose deaths recorded in any month since March 2019.
- We made the extremely difficult decision to temporarily close our supervised consumption service for health and safety reasons. We know that COVID-19 spreads more easily in congregate settings and the Works clinic was not set up for appropriate physical distancing.
- Many people who use the supervised consumption service are also more vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19. In addition, as I shared with you previously, last month we identified a case of COVID-19 in one of our staff members at the Works who has since recovered. With all of this happening, we needed to temporarily close this service to reduce the risk of further virus spread.
- I know it is frustrating and worrying for many – myself included – that we have not yet been able to reopen the supervised consumption service at the Works. My team is actively working to identify solutions to quickly resume providing these critical life-saving services, and ways to address physical distancing challenges. Right now, we are completing work to establish an appointment-based model for our supervised consumption service and we are aiming to reopen this weekend.
- In the meantime, we continue to provide harm reduction supplies through the Works, and we encourage our clients to visit other local harm reduction services in Toronto.

- Many of you may have noticed that fencing has been installed at the front entrance of our office located at 277 Victoria Street where the Works is located.
- We did this to support physical distancing measures to protect our clients and our staff. These fences will remain for the foreseeable future as part of our response efforts to COVID-19. We will continue to update the local harm reduction community on this matter, as the situation evolves.
- My goal in these daily briefings is to share key information that you need to know about COVID-19 in our city. I know that this is not always as fast or as detailed as you may want. Please know that we are doing everything we can to keep you informed and I thank you for being forthright in your need for more information.
- In the coming days I will soon be sharing more data. In the meantime, the most important thing you can do to help protect yourself, your loved ones and your community is to continue to stay home, stay safe and take care of each other.

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