

**Update on COVID-19**  
**Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health**  
**April 23, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.**  
**Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.**

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- One month ago today Mayor Tory declared a state of emergency in Toronto. At that time, there were 304 cases of COVID-19 in Toronto, 14 people in hospital, and sadly, one of our residents had died from this virus.
- Today, the numbers are very different. Today, there are 4,347 cases of COVID-19 in Toronto, including 3,933 confirmed cases and 414 probable ones, 293 people in hospital, 106 people in intensive care, and tragically, 222 deaths. I know that you join me, as you have each and every day, in offering sincerest condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and wishing those who are ill a speedy recovery. These numbers reflect our friends, families and loved ones and would be much worse if we had not come together to protect each other's health.
- I distinctly remember the day that everything changed for all of us, the day that I knew I needed to ask each and every one of you to take extreme actions to protect our city's health. We can always look back at these milestones, and know that certain moments will always be etched in our memory.
- March 23, 2020 was a cloudy day, and very stressful in ways that I could not have imagined, and I knew it was going to be extremely stressful for you too. It was the day that Chief Pegg and I advised Mayor Tory to take the unprecedented step of declaring a state of emergency. I remember looking at the evidence: our local situation and what was happening in the rest of the world, and I knew we had to act immediately because it is my job is to protect your health.
- I knew I had to focus on my patient. As your Medical Officer of Health for Toronto, my patient is our whole city, each and every one of you.



## Public Health

- I knew that to protect your health we needed to implement drastic public health and physical distancing measures that effectively shut down our city. I knew that these measures would change your lives both immediately and in the longer-term because how we live, work and play influences our health.
- I knew that these decisions would affect our local businesses, our economy and our health. And I knew these decisions would change how we interact with each other, and more importantly how we support and care for our friends, families and loved ones.
- But these actions were needed to save lives. They were needed to keep our hospitals from being overwhelmed. And they were needed to avoid the devastating circumstances we were seeing in other parts of the world like Italy and New York City.
- Today, the number of our COVID-19 cases in Toronto is lower than originally expected. This is because you took our public health measures seriously and these prevention measures are working. While this has been exceptionally challenging and an experience like no other in our history books, our battle against COVID-19 continues and is not over yet.
- As you have heard me say many times, our current COVID-19 response measures are based in part on the experiences of other jurisdictions. We have seen the positive impact of physical distancing measures in cities and countries around the world. We know that, like any medicine, they must be applied in the right dose, at the right time, and that they take time to work. Looking back, over the last month, we know our public health actions have prevented and continue to prevent further virus spread in our community.
- In public health, each and every decision that we make is informed by the best available science and evidence. It is hard to believe that this unprecedented, global pandemic was caused by a new virus that was unknown to us just 4 months ago. The science continues to unfold, and we are adjusting our approach depending on these facts and our local circumstances.

## Public Health

- As we look back on the past month since Mayor Tory declared a state of emergency here in Toronto, together with my team at Toronto Public Health, we have taken many actions to protect your health:
  - We have conducted approximately 4,000 case investigations and followed up with thousands more of their close contacts, to help prevent further spread of COVID-19 in our community;
  - We quickly launched a new technology solution to enhance our case and contact tracing work;
  - We educated local businesses including bars and restaurants on public health and physical distancing measures and continue to monitor their compliance with our recommendations;
  - We issued a first of its kind class order under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, to support effective self-isolation for those diagnosed with COVID-19, or at high risk of COVID-19 infections;
  - We have responded to outbreaks in local hospitals, long-term care homes, shelters, and other congregate settings and supported implementation of appropriate infection prevention and control measures;
  - We partnered with the University of Toronto and other community organizations to bring on volunteers to support our low-risk case and contact tracing efforts;
  - We answered approximately 20,000 calls from residents seeking information about this virus.
- And importantly, we encouraged you, in the strongest possible terms, to stay home as much as possible and only go out for the most essential of needs, and to practise physical distancing. And I want to thank you, sincerely, for taking these recommendations seriously.
- Our local health emergency continues and we need to stay focused to win this battle. In order to get to the point where we can get back to enjoying our city with our friends, our families and our loved ones, we need to stay the course.
- So with that, I sincerely thank you for all you are doing to protect the health of our city, and ask that you continue to stay home, stay safe and take care of each other.