

Update on COVID-19

Chief Pegg, Fire Chief & General Manager of Emergency Management

May 01, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.

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

Good afternoon.

I would like to begin my remarks this afternoon by acknowledging that Mayor Tory declared today as both First Responders and Doctors Day in Toronto and thanking him for doing so.

In my role as Fire Chief and General Manager of Emergency Management, I have the privilege of witnessing the service of our Police Officers, Paramedics, Firefighters, Communications Officers and our healthcare professionals every day.

Each and every day, our first responders and healthcare professionals give their all in service to others. This may never have been clearer than it has been during COVID-19. I extend my sincere personal thanks to each and every first responder and healthcare professional in our great city, both today and every day.

Earlier this morning, Toronto Fire Services responded to a fire under the bridge on Glen Road, near South Drive. This is in the Mount Pleasant Road and Bloor Street East area of Toronto.

Upon arrival at this fire, responding crews confirmed that the fire originated in a makeshift homeless encampment. Sadly, during the course of operations, one occupant of the encampment was located in the area involved in fire and was pronounced deceased.

On behalf of all of us, I extend my sincere condolences to the family, friends and all those impacted by this tragic loss of life.

The investigation into the origin, cause and circumstances of this fire is ongoing with Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Police, the Office of the Chief Coroner and the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal, who are all working together to determine how this loss of life occurred.

This is the 7th fatal homeless encampment fire in Toronto since 2010, and the first since April 2018. This is also the 33rd fire involving a homeless encampment this year, and the 190th such fire since 2017.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the City of Toronto has monitored encampment sites and removed dangerous materials, such as propane tanks.

While there has been a moratorium on clearing encampments during COVID-19, the City's Streets to Homes outreach teams have also continually been out, checking on people living outside and offering services, such as housing options.

On Wednesday, the City announced a new program that is immediately housing people living outside, with the availability of 125 units in two apartment buildings, in midtown Toronto.

As of yesterday, 47 people have moved into units with 24/7 staff support, security and case management, focused on long-term housing and other immediate needs, including harm reduction supports. This interim housing is a bridge to more permanent housing options. Encampments where individuals are offered this housing will subsequently be cleared, based on existing protocols, following the offer of housing.

This afternoon, I learned that some people are encouraging those experiencing homelessness to move into encampments, for reasons I simply cannot fathom. This advice places the health and safety of our residents at risk.

There have been 190 fires in homeless encampments in Toronto since 2017, seven of which have resulted in people losing their lives as a result. We are working hard to remove the risks and dangers that homeless encampments pose and, as the Fire Chief, I ask everyone to avoid providing this type of reckless and irresponsible action that would simply place lives at risk.

During yesterday's City Council meeting, the issue of our PPE pandemic stockpile was raised and I would like to provide some additional background and information on this important issue.

In 2008, Toronto City Council approved the creation of a Pandemic Influenza PPE stockpile. This inventory of PPE and related items was established over 3 years, between 2008 and 2010. This stockpile was designed to absorb an estimated 8 week influenza pandemic in Toronto.

Since that time, although efforts were made to ensure that the stockpile remained current and in place, a number of items in the previously established stockpile reached their best before dates.

Some of those items, such as hand sanitizer and influenza antiviral medications expired and were removed from active inventory some time ago.

However, much of the PPE contained in the stockpile continues to be serviceable and has backstopped our ongoing response to COVID-19.

In the past, we had believed an 8-week stockpile would be enough. But COVID-19 has emerged as a much longer fight, which requires much more PPE than anyone would have anticipated in the past. This issue has been one of the top priorities for our COVID-19 strategic command team.

In response to these command decisions, Mayor Tory has already asked that we immediately begin to plan to build up our PPE supply inventories as we prepare the City for the potential for additional waves of this pandemic.

I would like to acknowledge and thank our purchasing and materials management and emergency operations centre teams for their tireless work in procuring and maintaining PPE throughout COVID-19. Our PPE levels continue to be stable.

Our present inventory levels are as follows:

- 41 day supply of N-95 respirators;
- 199 day supply of surgical masks;
- 56 day supply of isolation gowns; and
- 20 day supply of face shield, with a large order of face shields incoming shortly.

In closing, I remind everyone that [Toronto.ca/COVID-19](https://toronto.ca/COVID-19) is the best source for reliable and timely information on COVID-19 in Toronto.

Thank you.