

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
May 5, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.
Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory. In today's update, there are 6,448 people infected with COVID-19 in Toronto. This includes 5,809 confirmed cases and 639 probable ones. There are 394 people in hospital and 105 in intensive care units. In total, we have lost 469 Torontonians to this virus. On behalf of my team, I wish a speedy recovery to those who are sick and extend my deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19.
- As I have stated before, these data represent our friends, our family members and loved ones. In public health, we use this information to help us to understand how an infectious disease – like COVID-19 – is impacting and spreading in our community.
- An important component of that data story is to understand if COVID-19 is affecting certain groups in our community more so than others, so we can then better inform prevention strategies.
- Emerging evidence from other jurisdictions suggests that COVID-19 is impacting some groups more than others. This includes certain ethno-racial groups and those with lower income levels.
- We have done some preliminary analysis locally that suggests similar trends in our city. It is important to note that this preliminary data was analyzed by small geographic areas, and not at the individual level. In our analysis we found that people living in areas that have the highest proportion of low income earners, recent immigrants and high unemployment rates had higher rates of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations.
- These preliminary findings suggest that COVID-19 might be disproportionately affecting certain people in our city. But it is difficult to get a complete picture using area level data. To strengthen our capacity to address this issue, my team is adding socio-demographic questions to our case management process.

- We will be asking all people who test positive for COVID-19 about their race, income, household size, Indigenous identity, and First Nation status. This will begin in the near future, after we have made the necessary changes to our database to capture this information.
- As I mentioned yesterday, as the weather gets nicer, I know we all will want to get outside. This is good both for our mental health and our physical health. I have been hearing first-hand from people who wonder why other Canadian jurisdictions are beginning to relax their public health measures while we are not.
- So I want to take a moment to address these comments. First, while our situation here in Toronto is certainly improving, other places, like B.C. for example, are at a different point in their outbreak than we are. We know that B.C. experienced the peak period in their curve approximately one month sooner than us and is now seeing fewer COVID-19 cases than we are seeing locally.
- As a result, they have recently stated that they are considering ways to slowly ease their public health measures. Unfortunately, in Toronto we are not quite there yet. In Toronto, we have not yet seen a steady decrease in the number of new cases each day nor in the number of new hospitalizations each day.
- In Ontario, communities outside the GTA are seeing less COVID-19 cases than we are in Toronto. This is not unexpected given our population size and as I have stated before, the reality is that COVID-19 does not impact all communities in the same way. In Toronto, we need to look at our own unique circumstances to inform how we reopen safely. We are Canada's largest city with a greater density than others and a highly mobile population. While our local indicators suggest that COVID-19 activity is slowing down in our city, we need to continue physical distancing measures until we see a steady decrease in the number of new cases and hospitalizations.

- We need to ensure that we do not undo the progress we have made with our physical distancing measures. When we start to see our local COVID-19 infections and hospital admissions declining we can start to ease our restrictions and slowly begin to reopen our city. However, physical distancing will continue to be part of our lives for the foreseeable future.
- I know that it is not reasonable to ask people to continue to stay inside especially now that the nice weather is upon us. We have been actively engaging with our city colleagues in the Transportation Services and the Parks Forestry and Recreation divisions and considering what we can do to keep our residents active and moving as part of our recovery planning efforts. However, we need to be measured in our approach for reopening our city.
- We are already seeing other jurisdictions slowing down their reopening in response to their local situation. For example, we recently learned that the plans for reopening retail stores in the greater Montreal area has been pushed back by one week. We have been successful so far in reducing virus spread in our city.
- We need to be careful to not undo what we've achieved together through your hard work and your sacrifices over the past several weeks.
- As we start to move forward please do stay safe, please continue to practice physical distancing when you go outside, and please continue to take care of each other.

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