

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
June 10, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.
Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory and good afternoon. Today there are 121 new COVID-19 infections in Toronto. To date, 10,310 people have recovered, an increase of 403 since yesterday. As always, for more data on COVID-19 in our city, please visit our website.
- As the Premier announced on Monday, a number of locations in Ontario are moving forward with the second phase of reopening. Toronto, along with other communities in the Golden Horseshoe are at a different point in their COVID-19 outbreak and will move to this phase at a later date. However, we are certainly seeing progress here in Toronto with a reduction in new cases and hospitalizations, and I will keep you updated on our progress as we move forward towards reopening.
- As we work to reopen our city, my team and I continue to focus on our COVID-19 response objectives to: prevent the loss of life; preserve our healthcare system capacity; and minimize the social, economic, and broader health impacts of COVID-19.
- I continue to receive questions each day about our case and contact management work and how this fits with our COVID-19 response objectives. My concern is that people think that case and contact management work is the simple act of speaking with a positive COVID-19 case to identify the people that they live and work with, and then to tell those contacts that they have been exposed to this virus and give them advice on what they should do, the symptoms that they should watch for, and what to do if they develop any of these symptoms.
- While this describes a part of our work, case and contact management, is actually much more complex than this. In public health, our patient is the community. This means for our work in case and contact management, we

want to stop transmission of disease. This is why we identify people who have been exposed to a COVID-19 case and advise them on what they can do to prevent further spread. However, the more complicated part is the work that we do to try to identify the source of where the person acquired COVID-19. This gives us the opportunity to work upstream to prevent future virus spread. Upstream interventions deliver a more powerful impact because when we are able to identify the source of the problem, or infection, we have the opportunity to proactively address it instead of treating it, and managing it, after it has occurred.

- As you may recall, our first case of COVID-19 in Toronto, was identified in January. To date, we have investigated nearly 13,000 cases of COVID-19. To put this into context, in a typical year, at Toronto Public Health we manage about 45,000 cases of roughly 70 reportable diseases each year.
- So not only are the COVID-19 numbers significant in terms of time and scale, also equally important to remember is the fact that COVID-19 is a new virus that we only learned of in January. Taken all together, this has been a truly unprecedented outbreak for us at Toronto Public Health. Never before have we had to manage so many cases, so rapidly, all while learning about the virus causing the disease itself.
- Despite the magnitude of this challenge we have been putting a great deal of effort into this. Throughout this entire outbreak, my team has risen to meet every challenge and set-back that we have faced, all during an unprecedented global emergency. My team has shown time and time again how dedicated and committed they are and I couldn't be more proud of them.
- My team and I are committed to making improvements every step of the way. To manage the volume and pace of the challenge presented by COVID-19, we have:
 - Mobilized and increased our workforce to now approximately 700 staff supporting the cases and contact management function and continue to scale up as our situation evolves. This includes partnerships with the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the University of Toronto, other local public health departments and a number of other health agencies;

--We have partnered with the City to build a new and more effective case management system in an unprecedented 8 weeks, in the midst of a global emergency;

--We have reviewed our own internal case and contact management processes to improve our work in this critical function;

--We brought in staff from the City's Emergency Operations Centre to conduct their own independent review of our work to improve our response and help us to prepare for the future; and

--We have partnered with labs and COVID-19 assessment centres to streamline results-sharing and to do everything that we can to make sure that cases and their close contacts are quickly identified and appropriately managed.

- Our recent data show that our efforts are paying off. While in the past we experienced delays in case follow-up times, in recent weeks we have made significant progress in this area.
- But I think it's very important to explain that there continue to be challenges in the broader health system outside of public health: in things like the way in which the results are reported to us and the delays that currently occur within the laboratory system, which in turn results in delays in reporting to us at public health. These areas need resolution from a health system perspective and my team and I are committed to working with individual labs, the province and other health system partners to address these systems issues.
- We know from other jurisdictions that as people go back to work and school, and interact more in the community, we can expect to see an increase in new infections. I appreciate that many of you are wondering what actions we can take to stay safe. I recently read an article that provided some useful advice, asking readers to consider four Cs as we move forward: close contact, confined spaces, crowds, choices. I think the simplicity of this advice is really appealing and useful:
 - Avoid close contact: continue practicing physical distancing and as much as possible, keep 6 feet apart from anyone outside your household members.
 - Avoid, where possible, close contact in confined or crowded spaces indoors, and wear cloth mask or face covering if that distance cannot be reliably maintained, or try to sit next to an open window.

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-- Be mindful of your choices: we will all make our own personal decisions of how we will act in the coming months. However, I simply ask that you think of others when you make these choices and to think about the potential impact of your choices on those around you who may be more vulnerable.

--When outside your home, you may also consider keeping a log of places you have been. That way, if we need to contact you due to a potential exposure to someone with COVID-19, we are able to work with you more readily to identify contacts and to do that important case and contact management work that we do in public health.

- It has been an incredible and very challenging journey for us as an organization. We have really been flat out since the beginning of this year. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge my team who has been working unbelievably hard, seven days a week for many, many weeks now. To them, my sincere thanks.
- As we continue moving forward, your individual contributions continue to be central to our success. So please, continue to practise physical distancing and please continue to take care of each other.

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Media contact: Lenore Bromley, Toronto Public Health, 416-338-7974,
Lenore.Bromley@toronto.ca