

Update on COVID-19

Chief Pegg, Fire Chief & General Manager of Emergency Management

June 24, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.

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

Good afternoon.

Nearly six months ago, I began working with Dr. de Villa, as we began to learn of the global emergence of "Corona Virus".

Under Dr. de Villa's leadership, the evaluation and proactive planning for what would soon become COVID-19, was underway – long before the first case was reported in Canada – let alone in Toronto.

In March, I was asked by City Manager Chris Murray, and Mayor Tory, if I would lead the City of Toronto's response to COVID-19.

In short order, I assumed the COVID-19 Incident Commander role on a full-time basis, beginning what has been a demanding, yet rewarding journey.

Together, we built and operated the largest incident management system in our City's history.

I will forever be proud of the way in which Toronto has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we continue into Stage 2 of our restart plan, I am even more proud of our city, and of our team, as I think back over the past number of months.

Throughout our response to COVID-19, we have never wavered from our overarching goals of saving lives and preventing our healthcare system from being overwhelmed.

We have all listened intently as Dr. de Villa updates us on rates of infection, recovery rates and unfortunately on the residents of our city who succumbed to the COVID-19 virus.

On behalf of our entire team, I extend my sincere condolences to each and every person who lost family, friends and loved ones to this terrible virus.

Throughout my career, I have maintained the same overarching priority at each and every incident that I have ever responded to, both as a 1st responder and more recently

as your Fire Chief – and that is to do all that we can to prevent both injuries and the loss of life.

There has not been a single day, where our teams haven't given their very best to save lives and to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We have had to make difficult, and often unpopular decisions. But in doing so, thousands of lives have been saved, and today we are able to proceed with the next stage of restart, as a direct result of the sacrifices made by each and every resident and business owner in our city.

You have sacrificed much, and have saved both lives, and livelihoods, in the process.

Our teams have been primarily focused on service restart planning and implementation for the past number of weeks now.

Our City-Wide Service Restart and Readiness team is now hard at work, under the leadership of Deputy City Manager Tracey Cook and in collaboration with members of the Office of Recovery and Rebuild, led by Saad Rafi.

Now that we are transitioning from COVID-19 response to city restart and recovery, I will now transition back into my role as Fire Chief, as well as the General Manager of Emergency Management.

As I transition back into Fire Services, I will continue to work closely with our Office of Emergency Management team and will continue to directly support our ongoing City restart efforts.

As an emergency management team, our priority will be to ensure that we are ready to respond to the next emergency, whenever that should happen.

We are also hard at work, ensuring that plans are in place in the event that we experience a future wave of COVID-19 in Toronto.

We cannot let up yet, as COVID-19 continues to circulate in the city. This is not over yet and we must all remain vigilant.

While our EOC continues to operate at level 3, and will continue to do so until the emergency declaration has ended, we are scaling back our Incident Management System, now that the COVID-19 situation continues to stabilize.

Of course, key functions including the PPE task force and the Business Continuity task force to name but two, will continue, in support of our restart and recovery teams.

Leading the response to COVID-19 has, without any doubt, been the most challenging emergency incident that I have ever managed.

It has also been the most demanding.

I will forever be thankful for my wife Katherine, my family and my friends who have supported, what has been the longest sustained response and deployment of my career.

If I were to take the time to name and thank every member of our team, who has given so much in response to COVID-19, we would be here all afternoon.

I am blessed to work alongside some simply amazing, dedicated and incredible people each and every day, from every division and agency in our city, who have gone far beyond the call of duty each day.

So, suffice it to say that I am deeply proud and extremely thankful for each and every member of our team, across the entire City of Toronto, who has given their all.

The results that have been achieved, have come at their hands and to each and every member of our team, I say thank you.

But, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Mayor Tory, City Council and the City's Corporate Leadership Team and to thank each of them for the unwavering trust and confidence that has been bestowed upon me in this role.

I am truly honoured to have been selected to lead our response to COVID-19, and so very much appreciate your support, trust and confidence throughout.

To Dr. de Villa: Thank you for simply being awesome. You have been a calm and steady voice, in a world of uncertainty, fear and anxiety.

We lived away from our families for more than two months straight, and together we reviewed, planned, calculated and responded.

You are a caring, compassionate and consummate professional, and we are more than fortunate to have you here, leading us all through this pandemic.

Thank you my friend.

Olivia Labonte, who - as she has been throughout COVID-19 - is here with me today and has been beside me from day one in this role.

Olivia defines what it means to be a genuine, professional civil servant who never quits.

Olivia, your energy, drive and passion for delivering public service never cease to amaze me.

Thank you.

And finally, to each and every resident and business owner, who have given so much as you have accepted our advice and direction and pulled together to beat COVID-19; thank you.

We have come a long way, but still have a long way to go.

I encourage everyone to continue to follow the advice of Toronto Public Health in order to do all we can to prevent a resurgence of COVID-19 in our city.

In closing and as always, because it just wouldn't be right if I didn't end my remarks this way:

I remind everyone that toronto.ca/COVID-19 is the best source for reliable and timely information on COVID-19 in Toronto.

One final big thank you to you Brad and our Communications and Technology teams who have worked every day to ensure that we are able to connect with our residents and media colleagues – thank you – you are all outstanding.

Thank you.