

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
July 20, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory and good afternoon everyone. Over the past three days, there were 107 new COVID-19 infections in Toronto. To date, 13,498 people have recovered, an increase of 121 since Friday. We are still seeing some fluctuations in our local case counts, but overall our numbers are moving in the right direction.
- As Premier Ford shared earlier today, Toronto will join other parts of the province in Stage 3 of reopening at a later date. While some may be disappointed with this news, if we move to Stage 3 too quickly, we risk losing the progress that we worked so hard to achieve together. We need to move forward with caution and care. We all need to try our very best stop this virus spread. This means continuing to prepare for Stage 3.
- As Mayor Tory indicated, we are seeking changes to be made to the province's Stage 3 order that apply to Toronto. We made these requests because we are concerned with what we are seeing in other cities that have resumed indoor service in bars and restaurants.
- Cities who were a few weeks ahead of us in their outbreaks and have since reopened, are now seeing increases in COVID-19 activity linked to reopening of restaurants and bars. In some cases, cities that previously had very low or no COVID-19 activity are now seeing increases in cases linked to these settings.
- Fortunately for Toronto we are able to learn from the real-time experience of other cities. My team and I continue to watch and learn from cities and countries that are ahead of us in reopening. And around the world the evidence points to the importance of a slow and steady reopening. We must accept some risks with reopening but the critical point is to make informed decisions that balance the risk with the potential benefit. We need to find the balance that helps our city to move forward in the safest way possible.

- The reality is, indoor public settings such as bars and restaurants present a higher level of risk because they involve the three C's of COVID-19 transmission: crowds, close contact and in closed spaces. It takes only one person with COVID-19 in this type of setting to potentially infect many others. This is why we are recommending seating and customer logs, mandatory masking, capacity limits and staff screening.
- We asked for these amendments to ensure that we are doing everything we can to protect your health and for businesses to safely reopen in Toronto. The reality is COVID-19 continues to circulate in our city. This means that we must all continue to wash our hands, keep our distance from others, wear our masks and work together in the coming days and months as we continue to live with COVID-19.
- This includes keeping track of where you go in the community and who you are with. Should you be diagnosed with COVID-19, having this information handy will help my team to quickly identify your close contacts. It will help us work together to stop virus spread and keep our city safe.
- As businesses reopen and more people connect in our city, there will be increased COVID-19 activity. However, if everyone keeps doing their part, I am confident that we will be able to enter Stage 3 as safely as possible. As we continue to move forward, please remember that our progress rests on all of us and the choices we make over the next several months. We all have to keep doing our part.
- On another topic, I want to take a moment to acknowledge that COVID-19 is not our only health crisis. I am saddened to share that last week we experienced a significant spike in suspected opioid overdose-related deaths in our city.
- Tragically, there were 16 suspected opioid overdose deaths over nine days between July 8th and 17th with most of these people under the age of 40. This is extremely difficult news to share and on behalf of my team I extend condolences to the families and friends of these individuals.
- Unfortunately, the ongoing opioid poisoning crisis has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, and these dual public health crises

are having a significant impact on our community. We know that the unregulated drug supply is having a devastating impact on people who use drugs. Too often there are unexpected drugs or contaminants in the drugs people are consuming, and this is resulting in fatal and non-fatal overdoses.

- In addition, the public health measures needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic are requiring us to stay physically apart to help prevent virus spread. This can be isolating for some and can lead to people – who would otherwise be very careful – to use drugs alone, resulting in tragedy.
- My team continues to issue drug alerts to share timely information with our community and we continue to promote harm reduction strategies as well. We are committed to addressing this very complex challenge.
- This is why we made several recommendations in May to the Board of Health to call on the federal and provincial governments to support the expansion of safer supply programs. These programs provide access to safe medications along with other supports and referrals to health and social services. The Board of Health supported these recommendations. We now look to our provincial and federal counterparts to respond to our recommendations.
- Finally, I am pleased to announce that our provincial colleagues are hosting another community pop-up testing site in the Black Creek area this Wednesday, July 22 and Friday, July 24. The testing site will be at the Christian Centre Church at 4545 Jane Street and will be open from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. I would like to extend my thanks once again to our colleagues at Ontario Health for this important initiative.
- In closing, we are all in this together. Whether it is the fight against COVID-19 or supporting our loved ones who are battling addiction. We all play an important role. So please wash your hands, stay home if you are sick, wear your mask, and please continue to take care of each other.