

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
September 9, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Lenore. Good afternoon everyone. Today I'll provide an update on Toronto's COVID-19 numbers and discuss our plans to support a safer return to school.
- Since Friday, we have continued to see a steady increase in new COVID-19 infections in our city. Today there are 58 new COVID-19 infections. This brings our total to 16,477. A total of 14,794 have recovered from the virus.
- I've been cautioning that we should expect an increase in cases as people interacted more over the summer and as they spend more time inside this fall. But I want to stress again that we aren't powerless here. There is so much under our control and that we can do to keep resurgence in check.
- We need to think about what we're doing, the risks of our actions, and if they're worth it. That's a decision only you can make for yourself, but I urge you to think through these decisions in the context of what's important to you, rather than just take your chances with your own health or anyone else's.
- That said, I'm going to turn right away to the return to school, because these days so many people are understandably wondering the same thing:
 - What's being done to keep school safe?
 - How will I know if there is a COVID-19 case at my child's school?
 - And what do I do if there is?
- This information will be soon be sent home to parents through their child's school.
- First: a case at your child's school doesn't necessarily mean there is widespread infection. Plans are in place to limit spread of COVID-19 as much as possible.

- Over the summer, my team worked with local schools to help them plan reopening. These plans include things we've learned from other places where school's already back. We have examples to follow, about what works and what doesn't.
- We have also assigned over 200 staff expressly to support schools, students and families.
- We have a school liaison team to provide advice on infection prevention and control measures, train staff and work with investigators if cases emerge at a school.
- There are dedicated school case and contact staff, so that case investigation and contact tracing begin quickly, appropriate steps are taken within the school, and, importantly, communication to families keeps them informed about what to do and what happens next.
- One of the things we know works best is to keep children who don't seem well from going to school in the first place.
- Every day, you should screen your children for any COVID-19 symptoms. Keep them home from school if they show any signs of illness or have been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Contact your doctor, telehealth Ontario, or Toronto Public Health's hotline if you have questions about what to do next. Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should get tested at an Assessment Centre.
- But, most days, most children will be in class.
- So what happens if someone tests positive for COVID-19 in a class cohort – or designated group – or within the population at your child's school?

- First, parents will be notified by Toronto Public Health if there is a positive case in the school. The identity of the person who tested positive for COVID-19 will be kept private. This is personal health information.
- Remember: not all students are at-risk if there is a positive case in the school.
- Next, our investigators will work with the person who tested positive, and their parents, to find out where they might have gotten the infection and who they might have passed it on to.
- This includes work to determine who they were in close contact with at school while they were contagious.
- At the beginning of contact tracing all students in a class cohort will likely be considered close contacts and sent home. If your child isn't in an affected class, they can continue to go to school as usual, but you should monitor your child for any signs of illness.
- All students who are sent home will be instructed to:
 - Stay home and self-isolate for 14 days;
 - Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19; and
 - Get tested if symptoms develop or if directed by my team at Toronto Public Health.
- My team will continue to monitor and support these students and their families. If more COVID-19 infections are found, parents will be notified.
- Students will be allowed to return to school as soon as the investigation finds that it is safe for them to do so.
- Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 will have to be out of school for at least fourteen days. Toronto Public Health will work directly with the family to determine when it is safe for them to come back.

- Another thing I want to talk about briefly is the concept of outbreak. “Outbreak” is a technical term that we use in public health practice. In the school setting, it has been defined by the province as two or more confirmed cases of COVID-19 in a 14-day period with at least one of the cases linked to the school. It is important to note that a link to the school can include bussing to or from school, and before or after school programs.
- If you hear, or read about a COVID-19 outbreak in a school setting it doesn't necessarily mean there is widespread infection happening in that setting. It means there are two or more COVID-19 cases in that school setting with a common link. The important thing for you to do is to follow this protocol as it applies to your child.
- This is the process my team has developed to keep parents informed. And as mentioned earlier, you'll soon receive a written document detailing this process from your school very soon.
- These COVID-19 protocols are in place to manage cases when they occur in schools and to communicate these details to parents, caregivers, and the community. That way, you can understand what's happening, the level of risk, and what you should do.
- Lastly, I ask that you please make sure your child's vaccinations are up to date, including getting the flu vaccine this fall.
- Back to school is receiving more attention this year, perhaps more than ever. And given that COVID-19 continues to circulate in our city this makes sense. But it's really important to note that in order for our schools to operate as safely as possible, we need everyone to pitch in and do their part to keep reducing virus spread, whether we've got kids in school or not. Because the amount of virus spread in our schools depends on the amount of virus spread in our community.



Public Health

- This is why I urge you to keep following public health measures so we can keep the numbers and the risks as low as possible in our community and in our schools. These public health measures surely sound familiar to you, but they are tried and they are true: wash your hands, watch your distance and wear your masks to reduce virus spread.
- I truly wish that I could say there won't be any cases of COVID-19 in our schools, but we know there will be. Everyone in our community must do their part to help limit the number of cases. My team at Toronto Public Health continues to work hard to support our schools, our students, their families and everyone else in our city.
- By doing your part, by following public health advice, you're protecting our children, our teachers and our community from potential illness. You're also sending the important message that you take the health of others as seriously as you take your own. And I ask you to imagine what's possible if together we do just that.

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