

**Update on COVID-19**  
**Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health**  
**September 21, 2020 at 2 p.m.**  
**Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.**

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- Thank you Mayor Tory and good afternoon everyone. Since our last report, we have continued to see a steady and concerning increase in new COVID-19 infections in Toronto.
- Today, I'm reporting 453 new COVID-19 infections in our city since Friday. This brings our total COVID-19 case count to 17,712. A total of 15,382 people have recovered from the virus.
- I have only one other thing to talk about in my update today. As a doctor, I'm trained to tell people things they don't want to hear. I hate doing this, but as a doctor, it's my job and it's part of my job to heal.
- That means helping people who are healthy stay that way, and making sure people who aren't healthy know what they need to do to get better.
- I don't want there to be even one COVID-19 infection in Toronto that could have been prevented.
- So it's my job today, as your Medical Officer of Health, to tell you what you need to hear. And it's this:
  - Life has changed and all of us have to act like it.
  - But I fear that, on some level, too many of us are unwilling to make the changes we need to make to keep everyone safe and limit the spread of COVID-19.
- Of all the things that I worry about at three o'clock in the morning, that's what worries me most.
- I am afraid it explains why too many people are doing things that are making the spread of COVID-19 worse.

- Let me be clear: there are many, many people who become infected with COVID-19 because of circumstances beyond their control. Their work, or their home, or their health place them at a greater risk.
- But that's not what I am talking about.
- What I am talking about are the cases that could have been prevented but weren't. The cases that happen because people let their guards down. Because people made "I'll be fine" or "who could it hurt?" decisions, without fully appreciating who it could hurt.
- We are all human. There is almost nothing that's harder for us than facing uncertainty.
- We cope by denying what we fear. By ignoring what's unpleasant. By telling ourselves it won't happen to me or if it does it won't be that bad.
- We justify choices that we know, deep down, probably aren't the best. We make mistakes. And at the same time, we know what safe behavior looks like.
- We've been in this for nearly seven months.
- The steps for self-protection are clear: Watch your distance. Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Don't gather in large groups.
- Be selective about where you go. And when. And what you do to protect yourself when you're there. We are able to avoid putting ourselves and others in harm's way.
- But a lot of us aren't. So I had to ask myself: why?
- We knew infections would rise with reopening. But why is it happening to this extent?



## Public Health

- And I keep coming back to the idea that on some level too many people refuse to accept that everything has changed.
- Things have changed.
- And we need to change too.
- We have a serious problem on our hands in COVID-19. We can outlast it – by protecting ourselves – but we can't ignore it.
- So we have to choose to live differently – at least for now.
- COVID-19 is here until there's a vaccine and we have to act differently until we get it.
- We have not passed a point of no return. I've said that before and I'll say it again.
- We can still turn this around. We can still do many of things we used to do.
- But we cannot do them the way we used to. Not for now.
- We have to accept that and make the best of it until we've got a vaccine.
- The best of it will be fewer infections and tougher choices, by each and every one of us.
- When a doctor diagnoses a patient you give them a sense of control by discussing what they can do.
- And this is what you're going to have to do between now and the day COVID-19 is under control: You're going to have to be really disciplined.
- Please be serious about keeping your distance from people that you don't live with.

## Public Health

- Please keep wearing your mask as much as you can, especially when you're with people you don't live with.
- Please keep washing your hands. A lot.
- You're going to have to be really thoughtful.
- Weigh your options. Ask yourself: do I have to go or do I just want to go? And if I decide to go, how can I make it safer or lower contact?
- You're going to have to be really kind to each other because this is hard, this is not an easy way to live. And you're going to have to make some sacrifices to do all of this, to get us to the other side of this pandemic. We are going to get through this. It is going to end. I ask you all to think about that and what you will do as we move forward through the pandemic and toward the day when COVID-19 is under control.

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