

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
September 14, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good afternoon everyone. Since our last report, we have continued to see a steady and worrisome increase in new COVID-19 infections in Toronto.
- Today, I'm reporting 264 new COVID-19 infections in our city. This is the number of new cases since Friday. It is not a single day increase. This new count brings our total COVID-19 cases to 16,873. A total of 14,999 people have recovered from the virus.
- There are, at present, 25 people in hospital with COVID-19. Five people are in ICU. This is a noted change that our hospital partners have recently highlighted.
- Our focus must be on what each of us will do to reduce the risk of spread. Remember, these new infections I just told you about occurred within the past couple weeks and there continues to be virus spread in our city. This means we should expect that our case count will go higher.
- I'll return to the numbers in a moment but first I want to talk about the return to school.
- I know that there is unease. That's natural, when doing something for the first time in a long time and especially in our world with COVID.
- I have said that I am certain there will be cases in our local schools. This isn't to say that schools will always be the source of the infection. Wherever it comes from, here's what will happen and what you'll be told if there's a case of COVID-19 at your child's school.
- Typically, the first to know about a confirmed infection is the person who has the infection themselves, or in this case their parent. COVID-19 test results are

like any other medical information: private. But remember, if your child gets a positive test result, you must let the school know and keep your child at home in self-isolation.

- Three things happen next:
 - First, the school system will let my team at Toronto Public Health know about the case.
 - Second, my team will call you soon after to help guide you through the coming days and weeks thereafter.
- We'll also ask for your help with the contact tracing process. This is so important to help limit the risk to other people.
 - Contract tracing is the third part. We will make a quick decision about whether the facts indicate an infected student's class or cohort needs to be kept at home to self-isolate. We will contact you if the decision applies to you and your child.
- All parents will be told if there is a confirmed case in their child's school. If your child is not part of an affected class or cohort, they can continue to go to school as usual, but you should monitor your child for any signs of illness.
- Remember, anyone who is at high risk is contacted first, to get them into self-isolation and away from other people.
- So now, let's get back to the case count. Let me give you some examples of how and where we're seeing COVID infections in our city.
- We know of a big family gathering where there was very little mask wearing and too much close contact. Our case investigators were told by those involved 'we're family, we wouldn't think we could get this disease from each other.' But of course, infections resulted.
- We also know of infection that resulted from a family trip where part of the time was spent with a person confirmed to have COVID-19.
- And over the weekend there were reports of a busy restaurant where a performer was moving from table to table, unmasked. It was noisy, people

were close to each other and had to lean in and speak loudly in order to be heard. This is a situation where an asymptomatic carrier could easily spread infection to others.

- Here's what this information doesn't mean:
 - It doesn't mean you can't spend time with family and friends;
 - It doesn't mean you should stop going about your daily life; and
 - It doesn't mean that one place is safe or that some other place isn't. It just doesn't work that way.
- Every place is a question of low, medium and high risk, determined in part by what goes on there and in a very big part by what steps for self-protection you take while you're there.
- So here's what this information does mean:
 - It means we can't tell who's got COVID and who doesn't just by looking at them.
 - It means people aren't immune from COVID-19 because you're related to them, or because they're your friend, or your co-worker and they don't look sick.
 - It means if you have COVID-19 you should stay away from other people and isolate until a medical professional tells you aren't infectious anymore.
- When I provided those examples I bet you just said to yourself: well, I'd never do something like that. I bet the people in the examples thought the same thing. In some instances, I know they did. They said so.
- These aren't bad people. This is just human nature. We want to socialize and we want to be together. We want to be close to one another and we want to spend time with people we love.
- We want to believe that COVID-19 will only infect other people. But that's probably the biggest mistake we can make right now.
- We can't do many of the things we used to do right now, not in the ways we used to and not in the ways we want to. This is hard to hear, and it's even harder to do. I get that. And I wish I could tell you otherwise but the fact is

you need to know that where we go and what happens to us, depends enormously on the choices we make. You are not powerless. You can protect yourself. You can protect others. You just can't act like nothing has changed. If you do, there's a real chance you're going to get sick or you're going to make somebody else sick.

- Your decisions and your choices are the most important part of living with COVID in our community. Last spring it was easy. The vast majority of us stayed at home, apart. We saw what happened. COVID infections declined. But last spring was also really hard. There are hard costs to being kept apart. But it isn't the only way to fight back against COVID-19.
- The most powerful weapon in the fight against COVID-19 is you, the people of Toronto. And right now, we've got to come together again, just like we did last spring. Whatever you do that brings you into contact with others, ask yourself first: Do I have to do this? If I do, am I taking the steps for self-protection that I advise each time I speak with you: watching your distance, wearing your mask and washing your hands.
- The current case count in Toronto is concerning.
- I'm asking everyone in our city to take a few simple steps for self-protection: watch your distance, wear your mask and wash your hands.
- I know some people find it hard to believe something so simple could make such a big difference, but I promise you, it's really true. If you're always taking these steps to protect yourself logic dictates that we can gain control over our numbers and still live more freely than we did this past spring.
- These three steps for self- protection work together to create a powerful sequence of actions that reduce virus spread. And they really, really do work.