

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
September 28, 2020 at 4 p.m.
Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory. Good afternoon everyone. As of today, I am reporting 381 new COVID-19 infections. This brings our COVID-19 cases to 19,033. A total of 16,034 people have recovered from the virus.
- So far this month there have been approximately 3,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections in our city. It's plain to see that there is an immediate, rising risk in Toronto of continued and significant COVID-19 resurgence.
- Nowhere in the city escapes the risk. We move around too much for that. But this is not the time to panic. It is time to act.
- As announced, over the past weekend my team at Toronto Public Health served orders closing three restaurants and bars, based on evidence they had not acted as required by regulation. Orders were also issued to other businesses, instructing them to better comply with our contact tracing efforts.
- Also over the weekend, new rules from the province took effect for the hospitality industry. These are important steps by the province. They reduce the ability of the virus to spread. That is the key. There is nothing inherently wrong with the hospitality sector. There is, however, a potential level of risk distinct to it, which the province acted to address.
- From my perspective I see logical next steps specific to Toronto.
- As a large, dense, and mobile city, and particularly as a population centre for young people, Toronto is seeing sustained increases in infections. I believe we can build on the provincial action so the city can further arrest the spread of COVID-19.
- In that respect I will make recommendations to City Council at their meeting this Wednesday. These recommendations will include:

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- Reducing the total number of patrons in any one bar or restaurant venue from 100 to 75;
- Requiring these venues to collect contact information for each patron at a table;
- Reducing the number of people at a table from 10 to 6;
- Requiring that background noise like music is no louder than normal conversation; and
- Extending existing by-laws created to govern the City during the pandemic until Council's first meeting in 2021.

- As your Medical Officer of Health I am acting to implement new actions as swiftly as possible that reflect the seriousness of the infection levels we are seeing. Where I can act under my own authority, I will.
- Where the participation of senior levels of government is required or will assist, I will work to secure it.
- You can count on me to do all that I can, and I will update you in this respect in the coming days.
- During the course of the weekend, we received inquiries from reporters about the safety of bars and restaurants and whether or not we recommend people go there. This allows me to revisit a particular concern of mine relating how people think about COVID-19.
- I want to be very clear on this point because I have said before – and feel compelled to say it again: I don't want people to have a false sense of security that if they just avoid one place – or kind of place – that another is safer.
- COVID-19 is linked to a wide range of locations. In the past few weeks we've seen COVID-19 linked to locations like private parties, a diverse range of workplaces, weddings, and religious services.
- I understand the belief that if we just list all the locations where infected people have been, it will tell us where we can go safely. It doesn't work that way.

- Even if we announced locations in real time, my team cannot establish the facts of a case until we're notified of a confirmed lab result.
- Remember, COVID-19 comes on gradually and sometimes symptoms never show up at all.
- By the time a venue is named publicly, the immediate threat has likely been over for many days. That person or persons are circulating in the community, not fixed in one place.
- Is there evidence that settings like bars and restaurants can contribute to spread? Yes, obviously, as indicated by the actions we took this weekend.
- If a venue isn't following the requirements expected of them in order to re-open and operate safely, higher risk results.
- If a venue is consistently doing the things they should be doing to operate safely, the risk is lower.
- But there will still be risk.
- So – truly – the most important thing to know is that you get COVID-19 from people, not from places. And in a big city like ours, people are everywhere.
- In that respect, in Toronto we have to acknowledge that the extent of the infection spread and the nature of city life means that the concept of the bubble – or the social circle – no longer reflects the circumstances in which we live.
- It was a sensible approach to exiting the strict isolation and restrictions of last spring. It was an effective model for safely establishing contact between people – at that time. But with re-opening and the return to school, times have changed. And that is what you need think about before you make a decision to go anywhere.

- Where you go in the city is less important than what you do when you are there.
- The decisions you make as you go about your activities are in many ways the most important way to fight COVID-19.
- The results we want won't come from rules that aren't followed. There's no way around it.
- That is why fighting COVID-19 demands we limit contact with people we don't live with – and watch our distance when we're with them.
- Why we need to stay at least six feet away from people we don't live with. Why mask wearing makes a difference. Why washing your hands makes a difference.
- We live in a world where there's an app for everything, so it may be hard to imagine such simple tactics can effectively get in the way of this insidious virus that we can't see. But they can.
- I'll end by repeating what I said at the beginning of my remarks: there's an immediate, rising risk in Toronto of continued and significant COVID-19 resurgence.
- Toronto Public Health is responding. Chief Pegg and the Emergency Operations Centre here at the City are responding. What we need you to do is to think carefully about how to protect yourself as you go about your daily activities.
- By limiting contact with people you don't live with, by watching your distance, by wearing a mask and washing your hands, you act to protect yourselves and by doing so you protect others too. It really is a powerful defence against COVID-19.



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- These circumstances aren't permanent. But they're real right now. By taking action we can limit the damage.

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