

Update on COVID-19

Chief Pegg, Fire Chief & General Manager of Emergency Management

September 21, 2020 at 2 p.m.

Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W

Good afternoon.

Today marks the 195th day of continuous operation of the City's emergency operations centre in response to COVID-19.

The enforcement of public health-related Regulations has been a top priority for the City of Toronto since the outset of COVID-19.

As always, we have done all that we can, in order to achieve compliance through education as opposed to enforcement.

We understand that the public have been asked to significantly adjust their behaviours in response to COVID-19.

This is why we have given people the opportunity to understand what is being asked of them, and to comply.

I am both proud and pleased that the vast majority of our residents and business owners have done just that.

Unfortunately, a few have not.

Enforcing the law, regardless of the context, is a necessarily complicated and complex process.

Enforcement requires investigation, the gathering of facts, and the application of often-complicated legal processes.

Enforcement action demands the independence of authority on the part of the relevant enforcement agency and their respective enforcement officers.

This has and will continue to be protected and maintained throughout the COVID-19 emergency.

A complaint by the public, that a law or bylaw is being contravened, must be investigated and confirmed by an enforcement officer before a charge can be laid.

Many complaints that are received, do not result in the determination that the law is being contravened, and therefore do not result in enforcement action being taken.

However, it is important to understand that the City of Toronto has taken formal enforcement action 1,408 times to date, in response to COVID-19.

This weekend, we received 21 complaints relating to gatherings.

The investigations into these specific complaints determined that the thresholds for enforcement action were not met.

In a number of these cases, the reported gathering may have dispersed prior to the arrival of the enforcement officers.

The amendments to the Provincial Regulations, relating to gathering sizes, are being implemented in direct response to COVID-19.

Large gatherings are resulting in increased transmission and spread of COVID-19, which places both the health of our residents, as well as the capacities of our healthcare systems at risk.

In my role as COVID-19 Incident Commander, I have convened enhanced enforcement coordination meetings, with our respective enforcement partners, to ensure that we are fully connected and coordinated on all aspects of COVID-19-related enforcement.

Our strategy is straightforward – we will enforce provincial regulations in an effort to arrest the spread of COVID-19.

This is complicated work that involves a number of enforcement agencies, including Police, Municipal Law Enforcement Officers and Toronto Public Health Enforcement Officers.

To that end, we are actively enforcing the Regulations relating to COVID-19 in Toronto, in support of our primary goals of saving lives, preventing the transmission of COVID-19 and preventing the healthcare system from becoming overwhelmed.

We are in the process of again streamlining our intake and dispatching processes for these types of complaints in order to provide an increasingly focused and robust response across the City.

I am directly connected with Police Chief Ramer on this, and all other matters pertaining to public safety, and will remain so as the situation with COVID-19 continues to evolve.

COVID-19 is still circulating in our city.

This is a serious matter and the public should be assured that we are treating it as such.

As we all know, the Province of Ontario recently introduced amendments to the Reopening Ontario Act that impose additional restrictions on gatherings.

Our coordinated enforcement teams are actively enforcing the amended gathering-size restrictions.

We are working together to achieve one overarching goal: preventing the continued spread of COVID-19 in Toronto.

I want to be very clear: When people choose to behave in a manner that is contrary to the established public health regulations, they are placing their lives, and the lives of their loved ones, at risk.

They are also potentially undermining the capacity of our healthcare system, and prolonging this pandemic.

It simply should not require enforcement action to prevent these behaviours from happening.

However, where clear violations of these Regulations are observed by our enforcement officers, we will not hesitate to take enforcement action as required.

The proposed recent amendments to the Reopening Ontario Act, empower Police Officers to order that a premises be temporarily closed, if that Officer has reasonable grounds to believe that an organized public event or other gathering is occurring at the premises and that the number of people in attendance exceeds the number permitted.

Further, the amendments will stipulate that a person who hosts or organizes a public event or other gathering, at residential premises or other prescribed premises, and the number of people in attendance exceeds the number permitted is guilty of an offence.

There are prescribed penalties associated with being convicted of an offence under these Regulations. Most recently, \$10,000 for an event organizer and \$750 for an attendee.

The coordination of enforcement action, relating to all COVID-19-related Orders and Regulations is a standing item on our Strategic Command Team agenda, which I am responsible for leading, and this topic will continue to be a priority for our team as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve.

Together, we will continue to do all that we can to protect the health of our city.

I implore everyone to comply with the gatherings restrictions, to continue to keep your distance from others, wash your hands and to wear face coverings when distance can't be maintained.

In closing, I want to thank everyone who continues to do their part to help us stop the spread of COVID-19.

As always, I remind everyone that toronto.ca/COVID19 is the best source for reliable and timely information on COVID-19 in Toronto.