

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
October 26, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon everyone. Today I am reporting 300 new COVID-19 cases. 132 people in Toronto are in hospital with COVID-19, and in the week that started October 19th, 16 people died. On behalf of all of us at Toronto Public Health, I extend condolences to all those who have lost friends or loved ones to this virus.
- The numbers represent the concerns we've been talking about lately with regard to the increase in case counts, the potential risks to people, the potential risks to the health care system, and the choices demanded by an infection rate that is heading in the wrong direction.
- I think it is reasonable to think that part of the surge we're seeing in Toronto is tied to Thanksgiving. It's been fourteen days since Thanksgiving Monday.
- Between October 12th and October 25th we saw 3,907 new COVID-19 cases in our city.
- Thanksgiving was on the mind of the top Medical Officer for the state of Illinois last Friday. Thanksgiving in the U.S. is a few weeks away, and in her remarks, Dr. Ezike was reflecting on American Thanksgiving and those who have been lost to COVID-19.
- At one point, she turned away from the cameras while delivering that day's case and death counts. She turned away fighting back tears. I understood why, and I still understand why.
- She is facing the struggle that all Medical Officers of Health are encountering, where the rise in case counts threatens real risk and real harm.
- I hope by putting it so plainly you will understand our shared dilemma.

- So much of what happens in the next few weeks rests with us as individuals.
- My message is always to ask you to think about what matters to you – and how to go about daily life in ways that reflect what matters to you.
- Because it seems to me the choices we make in daily life are now directly intertwined with COVID-19.
- The actions I am asking you to take are simple. The choices I am asking you to make are hard.
- That’s why everyone is so tired of all this.
- But the steps for self-protection really do work to make it harder for the virus to spread. COVID-19 needs a host – that’s us. To live and replicate, COVID-19 needs to find a home in one of us and then use us to infect another person.
- Our numbers are high. Right now, we’re making it easier for COVID-19 to spread, rather than harder.
- But these numbers in Toronto do not need to be a self-fulfilling prophecy if we have belief, will and perseverance.
- Those are the three things we need right now, because right now, we are choosing what the next few months will look like.
- We are choosing between a long winter of allowing the virus to do its worst, of trying to wait it out, surrounded by rising infections – and paying the price for it, emotionally, economically and socially.
- Or we can choose a winter with us at our best – acting with belief, will and perseverance.

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- It will still be a long winter, parts of it will still be hard, but when it's over, it will be something of which we can be proud, because we saw the risk for what it was, acted in ways to thwart it, and came out the other side, next spring with less suffering than what might have been and ready for a better future.
- Belief. Will. And perseverance. The belief part is what we want. Lower infection rates, less risk, to come through another day in good health because that's one day closer to vaccination and one day closer to living like we want to live.
- Will. That's acting in ways that reflect your belief in the things that matter to you, the things you want.
- Will is the steps for self-protection: making a deliberate decision to limit as much as you can your face-to-face contact with the people you don't live with. It's keeping a distance from those you don't live with, it's wearing a mask, it's washing your hands. It's choosing between the things you need to do and the things you want to do. It's choosing to defer what you can, in order to limit contact that isn't necessary in times like these.
- And perseverance. That's making choices that reflect your beliefs every chance you get. It will add up.
- We are a city of 3 million people. Imagine what would happen if 3 million people made individual choices each day to act in ways to mess with COVID-19. These are the kinds of things we need to believe in.
- Now, you will have your own individual reasons. I urge you to take some time to think about them, to remind yourself what is really important to you. Because when you know why you're doing something, it gets a whole lot easier to do it to great effect.
- I urge you to talk to the people you care about the most. Take a moment, and talk with one another about your expectations, your aspirations and your intentions for the next few months. What matters to you? Who matters to you? What would you give anything to protect?

- What are you willing to do in the months ahead to protect yourselves? What can you adjust? What can you give up or defer?
- How do you make the best of the months that take us to where we all want to be next year? What we're seeing elsewhere need not happen here – but it could, without your commitment to stop it from happening.
- The rising numbers in Toronto do not need to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- There is always, always, always the opportunity to turn them back. You do that with every choice you make that puts time and distance between you and COVID-19.
- Let's show COVID-19 what can be done.

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