

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

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon everyone. Today I am reporting 330 new COVID-19 cases. 149 people in Toronto are hospitalized as a result of COVID-19 and 34 people are currently in intensive care units.
- The reported case rate seems to have plateaued at just above 300 new cases per day, which is further supported by the reproductive number, which is at 1.
- While this is not where I would like the numbers to be, the situation is not escalating.
- However it was a difficult weekend in far too many places elsewhere in the world, as COVID-19's resurgence takes a renewed toll.
- The United Kingdom is just about to go into a four week national lockdown again, in response to the escalating cases of COVID-19 there.
- On Saturday the United Kingdom was just shy of 22,000 confirmed new cases. Our comparative good fortune in this country and in Toronto is something we should try our very best to protect.
- So I'm glad to share with you my understanding that overall, our city largely adapted successfully to Halloween this year.
- Anecdotally, I've heard that while there was significantly less door-to-door trick or treating, many families showed their creativity and their ingenuity in celebrating Halloween without door-to-door trick or treating this year.
- I've consistently heard about safely distanced costume parades outdoors and I just want to extend my thanks to those people. In addition to making choices consistent with the reality of the world we're living in right now, you set a great example for your kids and for all of us.

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- We're going to need resilience and imagination and adaptability to get through the winter and to the days ahead, when we're getting vaccinations and putting COVID-19 behind us. You were a great example this weekend and I'm glad you're out there. So thank you, once again.
- The next big celebration that bears thinking about in the context of COVID-19 is Diwali – the Festival of Light – celebrated in the coming weeks by the Hindu community.
- It is traditionally a time of significant gathering by family and friends.
- And for the benefit of everyone in Toronto I urge all of you celebrating Diwali this year to set another example for all of us, by adapting your celebrations such that you and your family and your friends come through Diwali in good health.
- The Indo Canada Arts Council describes Diwali as the “spiritual victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance.”
- As we try to celebrate with COVID-19 as an inevitable but unwanted guest, two words from that description seem to me particularly resonant: victory and knowledge.
- In 2020, victory over COVID-19 comes from knowledge.
- Whatever we may celebrate, we have reached a point in the year where we must think about how fundamentally difficult it is to accept there is risk, even danger, in events where we come together for the pleasure of each other's company.
- The idea defies what we take for granted – that celebration is when we put aside the worries of everyday life to take a little time just to relax and enjoy.
- I want to share a couple of examples of celebrations from around the province earlier this fall that went wrong because of COVID-19 – because they illustrate what can happen if we don't adapt and persist in coming together as if nothing has changed.

- I've read a report about a bachelor party, where a party of 13 men were at 2 different bars. One of them had a mild headache and runny nose. He thought he was having seasonal allergies. It turned out to be COVID-19.
- As a result of this evening, 3 people tested positive for the virus – but the event generated 16 high-risk contacts and more than 120 lower-risk contacts.
- The high-risk contacts were all advised to self-isolate for 14 days.
- That's not to say anything about the stress for all of them, waiting and wondering if they were infected with COVID-19 while they counted the days until they were in the clear.
- Two other examples could have happened to anyone and show just how quickly the virus can spread.
- In the first, 10 friends gathered at a cottage. One person developed symptoms of what seemed like a cold – but tested positive for COVID-19 after returning home.
- In the end, one person with symptoms led to 40 confirmed cases in 9 days.
- In late September 40 people attended a BBQ in a park. That gathering – outdoors – led to 27 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and in this instance, because children were involved, 105 high-risk contacts through school, all of whom had to self-isolate for 14 days.
- As I have said before, you don't get COVID-19 from a place, you get COVID-19 from another person.
- Where you are can play a part, whether indoors and outdoors. The risk is real and ever present, if you're not taking steps to protect yourself:
 - Spending as little time as possible with people you don't live with;
 - Keeping a distance of at least six feet from people you don't live with when you do spend time together;
 - Wearing a mask as much as possible;

- Washing your hands frequently; and
- Staying apart from others at any sign of illness.

- So as we move into the colder months, spending more time indoors and when we gather together even more than usual, I'm asking you to think about what you can do to stay safer and what changes you're willing to make to do it, because the risks are real and the choice is ours.
- As your Medical Officer of Health I would love to see COVID-19 eliminated in our city.
- Practically speaking, I think the best we can do is drive the infection rates down.
- Optimistically, I believe we can do this, but it will take all of us working towards that common goal.
- We're capable to having the upper hand against COVID-19 but only if we're constantly thinking about how to do this.
- I know we've got it in us – we saw it over the weekend when parents and kids decided they could celebrate Halloween by adapting.
- I hope adapting is something we will all try to do, not just for the holidays but every day.
- It will probably feel like a long winter, but with every passing day we're one day closer to vaccinations and life more like we knew it before COVID-19. I'd like to see the absolute maximum number of us get there in good health.