

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
November 4, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon everyone. Today I am reporting 338 new COVID-19 cases. 159 people in Toronto are hospitalized as a result of COVID-19 and 36 people are in the ICU.
- Today, I want to talk to you about how Toronto Public Health is working to support the safest reopening possible for our city.
- Back in early October, we recommended targeted, temporary restrictions for the City of Toronto. We did so because Toronto's rising case counts were trending in the wrong direction. It was clear that an intervention was needed to disrupt the very real risk that viral spread could run out of control.
- We have seen what this virus is capable of – we need only look to the United States or much of Europe to see what can happen when COVID gains the upper hand.
- Data from Toronto and around the world shows us that indoor settings where people come into close contact make it easier for the virus to spread. Bars and restaurants are closed spaces that create close contact between people, usually for extended periods of time. Additionally, at a bar or restaurant, mask wearing isn't practical, most of the time.
- All this is true of gym settings as well, with the additional concern that gyms are places where people are physically active and therefore heavy respiration is expected, further facilitating the potential for viral spread.
- But we also know that closing bars, restaurants and gyms has a high cost for people's livelihoods, for our local economy, and for our mental and physical health.



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- Going forward, our goal is to see the temporary restrictions lifted in the safest way possible, creating conditions that increase the likelihood that Toronto can remain that way. That's why we have asked the Ontario Government for additional time to ensure this can be done as safely as possible in our city – given our unique size and density, and the thousands and thousands of businesses that need clear information on how they can sustainably reopen.
- At present, our seven day moving average of case counts continues to increase. We are starting to see more hospitalizations. Yesterday, we reported a record high in daily COVID-19 cases. The figure is concerning but must be examined in the context of the case count figures for several days on either side of it. The need to monitor the data relating to virus spread was another reason for a later reopening date.
- To put it simply, our objective is to re-open in as safe a way as is possible, and to create the conditions and public health infrastructure to support this. It's not about business or health – we can and must support both, and we must do everything we can to get this right.
- So, what are we doing to create the conditions for the safest re-opening possible? Alongside our provincial partners, we're scaling up the necessary public health infrastructure to help keep cases low and prevent virus spread as much as possible.
- A safe re-opening will rely on having a comprehensive testing approach and capacity, on rapid case identification and isolation, on timely contact identification and follow-up, on supports for vulnerable and marginalized populations, and protections for workers who are needed to keep the health system and the city up and running.
- Our team at Toronto Public Health is significantly scaling up our work and approach in case management and in contact tracing.

- Toronto Public Health has never stopped case management and contact tracing in some key areas. We have always contacted every single person with a confirmed COVID-19 infection. That work never stopped. We have and we continue to conduct contact tracing work in high-risk settings like schools, daycares, long term care facilities and health care settings.
- And, we are working towards resuming full contact tracing in our City.
- Since the beginning of the pandemic we have increased our case and contact team from 50 to roughly 700 – the largest in the country. And we have 200 additional staff coming on board this month.
- We're in discussions with three Toronto hospitals – Sunnybrook, Michael Garron and Humber River – to partner in arrangements to add more even more capacity.
- We're making increased use of technological innovations, including text messaging tools, robocalls for low-risk contacts, and online surveys. In the coming days I will be sharing details on these new enhancements.
- We're also looking to the best evidence and experience of other jurisdictions around the world, and we are working on targeting contact tracing to identify super spreaders, with a proactive focus on finding events that cause a big number of infections and the people who are super spreaders.
- Contact tracing is a key part of our response. At Toronto Public Health our objective is not simply to do it well, but to be amongst the best in the world. But we can't do all this safe re-opening work on our own.
- Managing COVID-19 requires efforts by all levels of government. I understand that the provincial Minister of Health has made clear her willingness to help. And there are a number of important steps that should still be taken.

- Alongside case management and contact tracing, accessible and available testing needs to be scaled up. Sick day provisions should be enacted by the province so that people don't have to choose between staying home, or going to work when they're sick.
- We also believe that governments must continue to support employees and businesses to financially sustain and protect them through the pandemic. There must be workplace supports and protections for the people whose occupation is an essential service that we all rely on and work that has to be done in person and on the job, in places like hospitals, grocery stores, pharmacies, long term care homes, and food production and distribution facilities.
- We all have one shared fear: that COVID-19 will do its worst to us or to someone we love.
- As Medical Officer of Health, in pandemic conditions, my primary concern is for the people of Toronto. While the health of the public is not only measured by virus spread, virus spread is the biggest risk to public health at this time.
- The lifting of any restrictions should be expected to result in an increase of virus spread. That has happened everywhere. Now we have a formal provincial framework with measures that will guide the decision making process at the policy level, at Toronto Public Health we will do absolutely everything in our power to facilitate the safest reopening possible.
- And, as I've done throughout this pandemic, if I feel that additional measures or interventions are required or that more time is required, I will tell you.
- Finally, I want to speak directly to the people of Toronto. Whatever happens, wherever you may or may not go, no matter how long the pandemic lasts, the single biggest mistake you can make is letting your guard down in terms of protecting yourself from COVID-19.
- So please, don't let your guard down around your co-workers.

- Don't let your guard down around your extended family or your friends.
- Don't let your guard down when you notice you're experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 – get tested.
- At Toronto Public Health, we will not let our guard down. And we encourage every Torontonians to remain vigilant as well.

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