

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
November 16, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 538 new COVID-19 cases. 176 people in Toronto are in hospital with COVID-19 and 42 people are in the ICU.
- In the last 7 days we have reported 3,359 cases of COVID-19 in our city. The month is now half over and so far we've seen 5,721 reported cases of COVID-19.
- The case counts in Toronto are alarming.
- It's fair to ask if the restrictions put in place last month made a difference in the spread of the disease. I believe they did and have some examples to share with you today.
- As I told you earlier this month, we know that case rates per 100,000 population dropped in certain neighbourhoods where they were very high prior to the imposition of the restrictions.
- In particular, we saw this trend in parts of downtown Toronto where there is a high density of bars and restaurants.
- For example, the Niagara neighbourhood had a case rate prior to October 10th of 164 cases per 100,000. By November 7th, the 2 week case rate for this neighbourhood had dropped to 35 per 100,000, a reduction in the rate of 129 cases per 100,000.
- More broadly, it's concerning that while we see evidence of infection prevention and control efforts by local businesses, we still see examples of COVID-19 spread particularly when staff are interacting with each other – such as in the lunch room, or if they carpool together to work.



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- We also continue to see transmission at weddings and funerals, despite reduced gathering sizes.
- It's natural for people to want to be relaxed and close in situations of trust, familiarity or high emotion. But these are the circumstances that drive risk and infection.
- This is why it's so important that you think about how to limit contact with others, even when the situation is a place you want to be and with people you want to be with.
- The virus doesn't make that distinction. It will infect wherever the circumstances are right.
- The strategy behind the restrictions is to limit the ability of people to spend time together in high risk environments where the chance of infection is heightened.
- This is a difficult choice, but a necessary one.
- We have a study underway with York University which indicates that the measures we put into place did produce the kind of results we hoped for.
- Using Toronto case data up to October 25th, researchers at the Laboratory for Industrial and Applied Mathematics at York University developed a transmission dynamics model for COVID-19.
- Using this model, researchers identified how different public health measures have impacted the average number of contacts between people.
- The average number of daily contacts per person was reduced from 7, during the period following Stage 3 reopening, to approximately 4.8 after reverting to a modified Stage 2 on October 10th.

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- It's often difficult to prove what didn't happen as a result of taking action, but I would argue if the case counts at present are high – and they are – we can reasonably assume without public health measures the numbers would have been much worse.
- There is well documented evidence from many other jurisdictions about what happens when public health measures are not in place.
- Some may argue that by limiting locations where people can socialize we are simply driving risky behaviour elsewhere. There is some logic to this, which is where the role of individual choice becomes so important and which we can all agree no restriction, or rule can force.
- Between our own value systems and evidence like the York University study, which shows an obvious decline in person-to-person contact, I hope people will see their own power to turn the COVID-19 case count in the right direction.
- It can be done. Significant benefits can come from everybody putting their minds to it.
- We have to believe that things can get better, which I do and I hope you do too.
- The strength of our COVID-19 response and our ability to limit the spread sits on a foundation of what we believe and what we do as a result.
- It's why I acknowledge so frequently that it may seem hard to believe that simple things like keeping a safe distance, or wearing a mask can make a big difference. Not just here, but all around the world, scientists and medical experts confirm it's true.
- Belief is important as well, in terms of the risks we take, in terms of who we see and where we see them, and in terms of who we choose not to see, as well.



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- So I encourage you to believe in the power of the steps for self-protection. I encourage you to believe that keeping apart for now will make an important difference in the long-term. And I encourage you to believe that this will end.
- How it ends is in large part in our own hands. It was never possible to come through a pandemic of this scale without suffering and loss. But when it is over, how we have come through it, will be largely a result of what we choose to believe and how we act based on our beliefs.

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