

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
November 12, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 500 new COVID-19 infections. 164 people in Toronto are in hospital with COVID-19 and 36 people are in the ICU.
- Yesterday, we reported 435 new cases. So cumulatively, in the last five days, we've reported 2,432 cases of COVID-19.
- The medical community generally agrees that what is officially identified and reported is just the tip of the iceberg.
- It's safe to assume then, that there are more cases of COVID-19 in the community than we identify through testing.
- As I said on Tuesday, and I will say again today: you should assume COVID-19 is everywhere and that without proper protections, you are at risk of infection.
- Nothing has changed – but a lot can change if you are very disciplined in how you spend your time and who you spend it with and in taking the steps for self-protection that are well known to you by now.
- Last week I provided you with an update on Toronto Public Health's work towards resuming full contact tracing and implementing a series of enhancements.
- I told you about how we are growing to a nearly 900 member full-time team, the largest of its kind in the country and still growing.
- I told you about our work with local hospitals to add even more capacity.



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- And I told you about some of our emerging technological tools and measures to confront super spreader events.
- Currently, our case and contact staff are exceeding our target by contacting more than 90% of the people with new COVID -19 infections within 24 hours of receiving their positive test result and their contact information.
- Today, I would like to announce details of some these new additional contact tracing enhancements we've implemented.
- We have now launched new automated platforms as part of our case and contact management so we can reach people quickly and gather more information about their illness.
- We have a new notification system, drawing upon visitor and customer logs from venues to notify people who may have been exposed to COVID-19. This system has been created to reach more people in a timely way.
- So, let me explain how the system works.
- Initially the system was designed to alert low risk contacts of people diagnosed with COVID-19 about community exposure.
- Low-risk contacts receive a text message indicating they will receive a call from Toronto Public Health. Then follows an automatic voice message describing when and where they may have been exposed and providing instructions on how to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19.
- We've now used this system to reach out to almost 600 people with an average success rate of just under 97%.
- Additionally, given its success, we are now working to expand use of the system to send out messages to high risk contacts as well.
- We're also introducing the use of an online survey tool to support the collection of source of infection data.

- After initial direct contact by Toronto Public Health, people with a confirmed COVID-19 infection are directed to a survey that gathers detailed information about things like living arrangements, close contacts, recent travel, social gatherings and their employment setting.
- By allowing us to collect information on where people may have gotten the virus, or where they may have spread it, the survey will contribute to understanding about how COVID-19 is emerging in the community and will help guide and support the implementation of public health actions to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.
- 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. In the days ahead I will continue to update you on additional enhancements and innovations we are taking and adapting.
- In the meantime, what every one of you can do is this: don't become a case. The best way to do that is to follow the steps for self-protection, especially now.
- Try to limit your contact only to the people you live with.
- So going grocery shopping? Yes. Taking the family along? No. Outdoor dining? Yes. With friends rather than the family members you live with? No.
- Going for a walk or a run? Alone, yes. With someone you live with, yes. With your usual running partner? No.
- In short, don't spend time in social settings. Wherever possible, avoid in-person contact with people you don't live with.
- It won't be forever, but it should be for the foreseeable future. Infections are very high in Toronto and we need to get them down.



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- We see how much worse it is elsewhere in the world. If you think it's hard in Toronto right now, imagine what it would be like if Toronto was one of the places in the world where it got so bad that we have to go into a hard lockdown.
- The way for Toronto to get from bad to better is to deprive the virus of the opportunity to spread. To do that we have to maintain as much distance as we can.
- Yesterday we remembered those whose sacrifice paved the way toward the world we knew less than a year ago. We have the hope of having it back, with the promise of a vaccine. Let's not just wait for that second chance, let's earn it. Please be one of those people who is doing whatever you can to help us come through this pandemic and starve COVID-19 of its ability to spread.

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Media contact: Lenore Bromley, Toronto Public Health, 416-338-7974,
Lenore.Bromley@toronto.ca