

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
December 14, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

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- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon. I am reporting 638 new cases of COVID-19 today. 288 people in Toronto are in hospital with COVID-19 and 74 are in the ICU.
 - Since I last reported to you last Wednesday, Toronto has seen almost 2,800 new cases of COVID-19 and 181 people admitted to hospital.
 - In this context I want to talk first about schools to reassure parents as best I can. I know it is worrying to hear about additional school closures, even if it doesn't affect your school.
 - We have found that when an outbreak is linked to a school – since the start of the pandemic – it involves on average about five cases.
 - I hope it provides some measure of confidence when I say at present, the total number of schools closed is 13.
 - While one is more than anyone wants, 13 is the present total out of roughly 1,200 schools in Toronto.
 - We have acted to close schools where it was needed and worked to ensure the hundreds of schools still able to be open are open safely.
 - But as I have said before: while we support schools open, it isn't at any cost.
 - Everyone involved in the decision making process is paying very close attention to schools and has been since well before school returned in September.
 - We will continue to do so this week, this winter and until COVID-19 is under control, because safely operating schools is in principle good for children.

- Safely operating schools also provide a support to single parent families, or families where both parents have to work, particularly when their work is an essential service – which can be anywhere from the health care system to the food supply.
- COVID-19 in schools is reflective of the rise in infections in the community, where children spend the majority of their time.
- We continue to find that when a student has COVID-19 most often the infection happened outside of school, not at it. We must all be careful but we need not be fearful.
- It is important that in prioritizing the safe operation of schools, that we're also prioritizing safe choices and behaviours in the community – because community has a direct impact on school.
- In that respect, the facts tell us again today that we cannot celebrate in December like we would in any other year.
- We can't invite people into our homes who don't live in our homes, with any certainty that we're safe from COVID-19.
- The totals for December so far are just over 8,000 cases of COVID-19 and 364 hospitalizations – just 14 days into this month.
- Please remember this and act to protect yourself and everyone else – particularly in the next few weeks and in the coming months as well.
- The good news today is that the first vaccination has now officially been delivered in Ontario.
- There seems to be “new” news about vaccines every day, and after all these months, enormous interest in it.



Public Health

- After so long, it is a great thing that our hopes about vaccination have turned into justifiable expectations.
- The Province is managing the vaccine roll out and is laying out the plan for managing vaccine administration in the next few months.
- It is a three phase plan, which initially prioritizes health care workers and the people who are the most vulnerable to COVID-19.
- I hope everyone will take advantage of the opportunity to be vaccinated as vaccines become available, so finally it's COVID-19 on the defensive and not us.
- About 70% of the population will need to have been vaccinated to make the kind of difference that will make life feel more normal.
- But for many months to come – even as more and more people are vaccinated – we will still have to rely on the steps for self-protection that are our best defense against COVID-19.
- Consistent mask wearing.
- Avoiding crowds.
- Limiting contact with people we don't live with.
- Keeping a safe distance from people we don't live with.
- Washing hands frequently.
- As vaccines are rolled out, we will need to be patient, careful, protective but also justifiably optimistic.
- While the Province manages the early phases, for Toronto Public Health and for me the job remains to keep everyone focused on protecting themselves and acting to limit further spread of COVID-19.

- A resolution to this crisis is coming – though definitely not in time for Christmas or any other December celebration.
- This year, there's much we can't do, if we're to keep in good health, keep those we care about in good health and keep COVID-19 from getting any worse than it already is.
- But there is still a lot we can do under the circumstances.
- We can get together through our computer screens.
- We can pick up the phone.
- It might even be a good year to revive the fading tradition of sending cards – write in a promise to get together next year, when we can hopefully look back and see how the sacrifices we made were worth it.

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