• Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good morning. Today, I am reporting 1,069 new cases of COVID-19 in Toronto. More than half are between the ages of 20 and 49. 345 people are in hospital.

• We’ve seen a 55% increase in the 7-day moving average for hospitalizations since November 8. 92 people are in the ICU.

• And sadly, 4 people have died.

• Today’s case count figure is a record high for the second day in a row.

• Today is the fourth record high this month – following 957 cases yesterday and earlier record highs announced on December 16th and December 1st.

• Toronto’s case count since the start of the pandemic now exceeds 60,000.

• The level of infection is such that every neighbourhood in Toronto meets the province’s criteria for red zone designation.

• In the most recent data, from December 14th to the 20th, 21% of respondents to our online case survey reported gathering in a private home and with people who weren’t members of their household.

• Our fear is that these results, in fact, underestimate the degree to which people were mixing over the holidays.

• I last reported to you in person on December 23rd.

• There have been 4,252 cases in the seven days since.
While it is now five days since Christmas Day, I am not convinced that these cases are connected to it.

Cases are generally confirmed many days after infection – we estimate usually between one to two weeks following.

In this context, I have three key points to make.

First, it is now reasonable that we should brace for an extended period of potentially unsettling and discouraging numbers in terms of COVID-19 infections in Toronto.

Second, early next week Toronto Public Health will announce additional actions meant to reduce risk associated with COVID-19 in workplaces.

These steps by Toronto Public Health are meant to create as much distance and safety as possible – while respecting many people need to work and many businesses are rightly permitted to continue operations in order to provide the goods and services we all need in daily life.

Thirdly, for all of us, we have no choice but to resolve to keep apart as much as possible to limit further spread at these levels – or at any level.

It is possible, but it requires resolve, patience and belief.

We can make the virus level decline.

Right now, that may seem hard to believe.

The news during the holidays has focused on two stories: vaccines, and the variants of the COVID-19 virus that have emerged elsewhere in the world and are now being identified in many countries, including ours.

Viruses are always changing.
While we take nothing for granted, the scientific and medical communities anticipate changes in the structure of a virus and its ability to spread.

Science also has important insights into COVID-19.

The indications are that the vaccines as developed will remain effective against the virus – or that if it somehow becomes necessary to adapt the vaccines, that can be done.

Now is the time to focus on steps for our own self-protection – and the protection of others – because the risks around us are escalating.

The next several months cannot be seen as just the stretch of time between vaccine trial results and needles in arms, or a period just to be waited out until it’s our turn for the shot.

We must be active, we must be vigilant, determined and patient while we wait our turn.

I urge you to double down on keeping apart, keeping a safe distance and wearing your mask every time you can.

Most critically: Go only where you need to.

This has two benefits:
--First, it keeps you apart. When you are apart, you face the least amount of risk.
--Second, it protects others, because there are always people who have no choice – they have to be out.

But when you can stay home, do.

The fewer people we have mixing at this point is perhaps the most important defense against COVID-19 that is under our control.
• We will need to believe we can change things and act like it in the next few weeks, particularly if we have to get through a period of discouraging case counts.

• We should prepare for those numbers.

• We should act to make certain that they will come down.

• It is our only choice and it is never too late to make it.

• In all of us lies the capacity to begin turning these numbers around.

• It isn’t impossible – and it won’t be easy.

• We need to be clear on that as we enter the new year.

• However, it can be done and we can do it.

• It isn’t a question of if.

• We can.

• But we have to earn this one.

• I wish all of you good things in 2021.

• Please be active, vigilant, determined and patient and let us unite to put COVID-19 behind us.

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