

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
December 7, 2020 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and thank you in particular for your review of TO Supports. From a public health perspective I wholly support the COVID-19 Equity Action Plan. It is vital for producing real change at the community level, to address the heavy price being paid in neighbourhoods where COVID-19 is striking hardest.
- I am reporting 651 new cases of COVID-19 today. 227 people are in hospital as a result of COVID-19 and 57 people are in the ICU.
- We are now less than 20 days from Christmas day and a week into a month traditionally filled with celebrations and observances in many faiths and cultures.
- This year cannot be as usual.
- December is 7 days along and we have reported just slightly more than 4,100 new cases of COVID-19 and 68 deaths from it.
- The case counts are so high that I can only call this a very, very serious situation.
- There is no way to argue otherwise.
- COVID-19 is spreading aggressively in Toronto.
- On December 1st, we had 761 reported cases. Then followed 438 cases, 421 cases, and then 671 cases. On December 5th, 550 cases. Then 609 cases yesterday, and 651 cases today.
- I do not want to contemplate what the case counts might be had we *not* entered lockdown.

- I am worried about the threat to our own health and I am worried about three real risks manifesting in the health care system.
- First, the increasing need for COVID-19 related care. The virus is steadily sending more people to hospital in need of treatment.
- Even cases that recover at home are regularly described as rough enough.
- The increasing need for hospital care should be something we all take seriously – the virus is sending more people to hospital.
- Second, with more COVID-19 care required in hospital, the risk increases for the people who provide that care. Paramedics, technicians, nurses, doctors – all hospital staff.
- The system relies on these people. We rely on these people. We need them well and able to do their jobs.
- Finally, the impact on other health care services. As COVID-19 related care diverts resources, the rest of the system slows.
- Risk can increase.
- Discomfort, pain and disability can drag on.
- The more we can do – those of us who are well – to stay that way, the more we do to protect these vital resources.
- We owe it to the health care system, which we all treasure.
- In our own lives, risky in-home festivities will easily make things worse and already I'm as worried now about what may happen in January as I am about the rest of this month.



Public Health

- Contact between people, especially from December 24th to New Year's Day, could easily amplify the number of infections we are seeing right now.
- The guidance from the province advises that the safest way to spend the holidays this year is by celebrating only in person with the people you live with and celebrating virtually with everybody else.
- If you live alone, consider exclusively celebrating with one additional household.
- Of particular concern will be the return of university students coming home for the holidays.
- Here the provincial guidance is that individuals living away from home, including those studying at colleges and universities, should consider doing a self-quarantine, or reducing close contact with others, 10 to 14 days before returning home for the holidays.
- I agree that all of this it is the right advice.
- I do not believe that it is safe to do otherwise.
- I do not believe that it is worth it do otherwise.
- I can't be any plainer than that.
- The advice is designed to strengthen the things we know that work: keeping as much as we can to our own homes and the people we live with.
- Keeping a distance between ourselves and others is not just measured by six feet, or two metres. It's also measured by the time we spend with others and who those others are.

- When we have to be out, then the six feet, or two metres, is the measure that matters – by at least those six feet, or two metres. The greater the distance, the better off you are. And this is when we have to wear our masks and wash our hands as much as possible.
- Our beliefs, faiths and cultures mean December celebrations vary. But whatever their distinctions, most share in common time and occasions that bring us into close contact. And after this long year, everyone is vulnerable to the need to relax and forget.
- So if your holidays usually involve lots of time with friends and family, please start thinking now about the change you will make for your own safety and commit to those changes.
- Making the best of a very different holiday season, like so much this year, demands that we do things differently.
- Human nature being what it is, this isn't an easy commitment to make and it's going to take some time to get used to.
- I think I can speak for all of us in saying that what we want most this year is for all this to be over.
- And we can get there – if we make the choices this moment demands.
- By joining together in staying apart, we will deliver a safer holiday in 2020 that positions us for the holidays and the everyday lives we want in 2021.