Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
January 18, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 892 new cases of COVID-19. 491 people are in hospital, 113 are in the ICU, and I regret to tell you that there are 2 more deaths to report.

- There are 50 active outbreaks in long-term care homes and 12 in retirement homes.

- This is important because as everyone knows the delivery schedule for the Pfizer vaccine has been slowed by the need to retool Pfizer’s principal vaccine production facility.

- But as the Mayor just said, fortunately, the first round of vaccinations have been delivered in Toronto at all 87 long-term care homes.

- Across Ontario, the Province has decided the best course of action for now is to reallocate the available supply of vaccine to ensure that it is provided to long-term care homes and high risk retirement homes, and to deliver second doses to those who have received their first dose of vaccine.

- In my view as a physician, this is the sensible strategy for allocation of available vaccine given the circumstances.

- But on a personal level, I can understand how people feel about news like this.

- Everyone wants their turn.

- So as your doctor, I would say this to you: stay patient and stay optimistic.

- There is good reason for both.
While we want the flow of vaccine to be swift, uninterrupted and high volume, the fact of the matter is this is the first time a vaccination campaign on this scale has ever been designed and implemented – and the whole world needs their share of vaccines.

Public health has years of experience in the delivery of mass vaccination programs.

And from experience, I can tell you that even with the best plans there are bumps in the road.

We should all prepare ourselves mentally and emotionally for those bumps.

But bumps will not alter the determination to get those vaccinations in arms.

My understanding is that deliveries of Pfizer vaccine are expected to catch up through February and March.

Additionally, Health Canada is reviewing data on the AstraZeneca/Oxford and Johnson & Johnson vaccines and the federal Health Minister said recently that a decision on the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine is in the near future.

So please, be patient, be optimistic and let me add – be determined.

While the vaccines arrive and vaccines are delivered, we’ve still got to protect ourselves from COVID-19 because it is still circulating and will continue to circulate.

But with those efforts what will happen is that the case counts will decline.

In Toronto we’re already seeing signs of how we, we ourselves, are truly the best defense against spread of the virus.

Anecdotally, over the weekend, when I was out walking I saw that the significant majority of people on the streets were masked.
• This said to me that people were taking control and making decisions to protect themselves and reduce spread and I was delighted to see it.

• Additionally, as you know, Toronto Public Health is able to analyze non-identifying cell phone data.

• One measure we look is data that reflects how much time people are spending at home.

• Time-at-home measures were high last March and then decreased over the summer during reopening.

• We saw modest increases in time-at-home following additional measures put in place in October and November.

• Interestingly, the most recent data – for January 3rd to 9th – shows time at home at 82%. In March of last year it was 87%.

• This suggests that the lockdown from December 26th has had some impact on movement in Toronto.

• It is early going though, but if it holds then over time decreases in case counts and hospitalizations should begin to emerge.

• It can happen – if we are determined to stay at home and apart from people we don’t live with, for the short-term.

• Imagine a city – not so many months from now – where we are all vaccinated but where COVID is at low levels while we get there.

• We can get there, so let’s.

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