

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.



Public Health

- 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.