

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
February 1, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

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- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 961 cases of COVID-19. 397 people are in hospital and 105 are in the ICU. I regret to tell you that 18 people have died.
 - The case counts today are higher as a consequence of adjustments due to the transition to the provincial information system for case and contact management which we announced last week.
 - The change will bring Toronto Public Health into the same data reporting system as all other public health units.
 - That work began over the weekend and is advancing steadily.
 - All our other activity is proceeding as usual.
 - As I indicated last week, the full suite of data we typically provide will be reduced this week.
 - Toronto Public Health will continue to provide the new cases over the previous day, as well as total cumulative cases, new hospitalizations since the previous day, ICU admissions, intubations, deaths since the previous day and cumulative deaths.
 - The data migration from one system to another is complete.
 - We are now in the phase of quality controls, which may require adjustments to figures as that work is finalized.
 - Also today we have just issued a media release with regard to an outbreak in Toronto seeming to involve the B.1.1.7 variant.

- The outbreak occurred at Belmont Meats, a meat production facility here in Toronto.
- Currently, there are 78 confirmed COVID-19 cases linked to this outbreak.
- Of these confirmed cases, two have screened positive for the B.1.1.7 variant and will undergo further testing to confirm these are variants of concern and the type.
- Toronto Public Health has communicated to advise cases and contacts that the variant has been identified in this outbreak.
- COVID-19 variants have been with us throughout the pandemic.
- This is not to minimize the concerns about the three variants that have been talked about so much recently.
- What is believed about the known variants of concern now is that they are more transmissible, they may be able to make some people sicker, they may be able to reinfect people who've had COVID-19 and recovered, and finally that the vaccines developed seem able to produce an immune response despite the variants, although sometimes at lower levels.
- We should make decisions for ourselves on this basis, for our own self-protection.
- While variants in viruses do emerge regularly, with respect to COVID-19 modelling and declining case rates in other parts of the world suggest strategies that create distance and limit interaction are still successful – even where the variants are present.
- Certainly the trend in cases in Toronto says the measures we're taking are working – both the measures put in place by the Province and the measures we take as individuals.
- The non-identifying cell phone data we are able to access demonstrates this.

- The figures we have for mid-January indicate 81% of device-time at home – that’s almost as high as last spring.
- That time at home – time apart – is exactly what we need to sustain the indicators we’re seeing.
- It is good news – but the work is far from done and as we see today, the stakes are high.
- We need to keep at it to minimize the risk we wind up back where we started.
- The Centre for Disease Modelling at York University shows that if transmission of COVID-19 increased by 20%, we would expect 3 times more cumulative deaths by May, compared to the number if transmission stayed at the levels we saw last week.
- If transmission were to continue to decrease even more, we could expect to cut the total number of deaths almost in half.
- This underscores the importance of distance in every respect.
- To mutate, viruses have to replicate.
- To replicate, viruses need human cells.
- So our job is not to give it to them.
- More than ever, stay home and stay apart, as much as you can.
- It’s important we continue to see the recent decreases in case counts as a trend in the right direction – but not one to be taken for granted. One of the most important things we know is how variants occur and what we can do to limit the impact.



Public Health

- Whatever you can do, however you can do it: distance, distance, distance, in any form you can create it, from space between you and others to wearing a mask as much as possible.

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Media contact: Lenore Bromley, Toronto Public Health, 416-338-7974,
Lenore.Bromley@toronto.ca