• Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 421 new cases of COVID-19. 414 people are in hospital and 94 are in the ICU. Sadly, 13 people have died.

• With regard to data, the transition to the province’s system is now largely complete and we plan to resume full reporting shortly, later this afternoon.

• In the short term there remains the possibility of some adjustments or some updates to data as a result of the transfer which for the most part has gone very well given the size and the complexity of this task.

• Today, we are in a transition from one pandemic to another. A transition to a new pandemic.

• It was inevitable the variants of concern would emerge in Toronto.

• The UK variant – B.1.1.7 – is confirmed.

• Screening indicates the South African variant B.1.351 and the Brazilian variant P.1 are here too.

• I take the view that it is important to see the circumstances for what they are. We are in a position of great uncertainty with respect to variants, but what we know is alarming.

• I understand the value of preparing for the time we can lift restrictions. From a public health perspective in Toronto, that time is not now.

• Decisions to reopen do not come with guarantees – except that cases of COVID-19 will rise when we interact again more frequently.
We've seen this before, there is no reason to believe it will be different this time. In fact, there's probably less.

If – as expected – variants of concern become the dominant strain in Toronto there is an even greater likelihood of case counts increasing, given increased transmissibility is proven by science to be true.

Last week I spoke to projections about COVID-19 deaths if transmission increased going forward.

Here is a more detailed look at that, in work provided by the Centre for Disease modelling at York University.

The model examines the levels of death at various levels of virus transmission.

It is based on transmission rates as seen in Toronto in mid-to-late January.

On that basis, according to the model, with unchanged transmission rates, the death toll for Toronto would rise to almost 5,500 by this May.

If transmission increased by 10%, the model finds Toronto’s death toll would rise to slightly more than 9,200 fatalities.

If transmission increases by 20%, we would expect 15,865 deaths by May of this year.

So far in the pandemic we’ve seen a little more than 2,500 deaths in total.

Rising cases is an inevitable consequence of mixing, particularly if we do not take steps to protect ourselves from the spread of the virus.

Recall that at Thanksgiving and Christmas last year we saw corresponding rises in case counts afterwards – illness, strain on the health care system, strain on health care workers, strain on the economy.
There is also the return to school to consider in this context, which is now a little more than a week away.

So we will face a real challenge when presented with the opportunity to move about again with reduced restrictions, but without more protection from COVID-19.

Add to that the real chance there is actually greater risk of infections, because the variants of concern make COVID-19 even easier to catch and easier to spread.

COVID-19 and its mutant variations are out there, seeking a host through which to live and through which to spread to the next person, and the next person, and the next.

There is always a lot under our control as individuals.

One of these things is understanding and accepting realities.

The threat of COVID-19 has not gone away and unfortunately, a lifting of restrictions will not make it go away.

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