

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
February 8, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- 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.

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- 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.

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- 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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