

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
February 10, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

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- Thank you, Chief Pegg, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 440 new cases of COVID-19. 426 people are in hospital and sadly, 16 people have died.
 - There are 32 confirmed cases of the UK variant in Toronto.
 - Living with COVID-19 right now is like trying to find our way out of a maze.
 - As we look around almost everything looks the same, no matter where we turn.
 - There are choices about which way to go.
 - What looks like the way out can come to a dead end.
 - Even so – step by step – we are finding our way toward the exit.
 - The vaccines are part of the pathway out of this maze.
 - There are many people who'd roll up their sleeve for one of the vaccines the minute they get the chance.
 - And there are some who are hesitant.
 - Often you hear concern about the speed with which the vaccines were developed.
 - I would say this: medical researchers and scientists were able to develop these vaccines this quickly not for lack of caution, but on the strength of modern science and the speed of modern technology.

Public Health

- If a threat of this nature was to confront us in our lifetimes, better it happened now, with so much knowledge and science available to us, more than at any other time in human history.
- I am not certain that even just five years ago we could have developed vaccines such as we have today in the same amount of time.
- Canada has approved two vaccines, from Pfizer-Biontech and Moderna, and two await approval, which I expect will be soon – from Oxford-AstraZeneca, and Johnson and Johnson.
- There have been delays in delivery, which is frustrating for everyone – so for now most of us are waiting our turn.
- From a public health perspective I must ask that you wait mindfully.
- There are a significant number of risks to us because of the variants we've talked about increasingly in the last several days.
- I believe that will continue in the weeks ahead.
- The variants and the vaccines intersect on our way out of the pandemic because one can affect the other.
- Variants can grow into a significant public health threat, spreading widely and with potentially overwhelming speed thanks to mutations that make the virus easier to catch.
- The UK has been in full lockdown since January 4th and is still developing its exit plan.
- We know there are 32 confirmed cases of variants of concern in Toronto.
- The variant spread from elsewhere gives us every reason to believe variants will spread here in the same way.

Public Health

- So in the weeks ahead, let's make decisions about the degree to which we mix with one another to make it harder – not easier – for COVID-19 to spread in any form.
- We do not want to make the situation worse.
- That's dangerous to health, to life, to the economy and, potentially, to the vaccines we're all counting on.
- The more the virus spreads the more it can mutate, creating the risk that more or new variants of concern will confront us, and create more delay on the road back to normal life.
- We do not want the variants to complicate the role of the vaccines in bringing an end to the pandemic.
- So as ever it is my job to urge you to keep strictly apart as much as absolutely possible, in anticipation of our access to the vaccines we are all counting on.
- The vaccines work.
- We must be ready for them.
- In the current environment, readiness is more than waiting.
- It's keeping our distance, staying home, wearing well- fitting masks and limiting interaction to keep the virus at bay, until we receive the vaccines that will cut off its ability to thrive.