

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
March 3, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 290 new cases of COVID-19. 285 people are in hospital, and 62 people are in the ICU. I'm sorry to have to report as well an additional 5 deaths.
- 1,468 cases have screened positive as likely variants of concern.
- We have 126 cases that have been confirmed as variants following laboratory testing:
 - 122 are the U.K. variant B.1.1.7.
 - 3 are the Brazilian variant.
 - 1 is the South African variant.
- The variant figure is not what I want to see.
- A week ago, the screened positive number was 710.
- So in a week, the number of cases screening positive for a variant has more than doubled.
- I have said throughout the pandemic that I am guided by the facts as they are.
- I have never decided easily to recommend restrictions for Toronto.
- I understand that each course of action comes with benefits and costs.
- Overall, case counts at present call for a cautious approach that will allow us to reopen and to do so as safely as possible. Based on the data in front of us, it is clear that reopening widely such as under the red category of the provincial framework is not advisable at this time given our current case counts.

Public Health

- Moving out of the stay at home order is a reasonable course of action for Toronto – although I will add that while there are evident reasons for a change in status, there remain reasons or risks that underscore how moving back into grey status is and will be a delicate balance.
- It comes down to our choices in our daily lives.
- Our ability to make the right choices is the reason a move in this direction is possible.
- While I believe moving into grey is reasonable, we are also scaling up enhanced safety measures to protect those essential frontline workers who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.
- The people, the employees and the businesses of Toronto have earned this change through their commitment, often at a personal sacrifice.
- The businesses that closed in Toronto to help limit the spread of COVID-19 were closed ahead of so many others in other parts of the province.
- And my honest belief is that by shouldering that burden, Toronto helped Ontario to limit the spread across the province.
- Returning to the province's framework represents a modest step toward more flexibility in daily life, which can be taken because we've all worked to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- It is important we now act in ways that do not squander these hard earned, small steps forward.
- In that respect, I am issuing a new Section 22 order for workplaces in active outbreak, with requirements aimed at shoring up the gains made in the past many weeks and offering protections for people on the job.
- The order requires businesses to ensure the use of masks by every person in the workplace, at all times, for the duration of the outbreak.

- To follow Toronto Public Health's instructions pertaining to the investigation of the outbreak.
- To ensure distancing and reduced capacities in shared spaces at the business.
- To have a designated contact person for Toronto Public Health to work through during the outbreak.
- To maintain records of every person entering the workplace.
- To comply with infection prevention and control measures and post signage about physical distancing, hand washing and mask wearing.
- Like the measures we all undertook in the last weeks and months, these measures for workplaces will have a beneficial effect on our efforts to gain control over COVID-19.
- While these requirements apply only to workplaces in active outbreak, I'm asking all businesses in Toronto to show their support and implement these measures because they're not in outbreak – to take steps to prevent winding up in outbreak.
- The province has also agreed to do a proactive enforcement blitz on workplaces based on the history of health risk we've observed in these settings throughout the pandemic.
- We have seen the results when everyone is working toward the same goal.
- We are on the cusp of taking a much wanted step towards a little more flexibility in our daily lives.
- But – and until we've brought COVID-19 well under control there will always be, must always be, a but – but the steps for self-protection are more valuable and vital than ever.

- It's now a question of preserving what we've gained.
- The case counts are down, but the variant cases are up.
- What may be possible can only come from a continued decline in cases, from arresting the spread of the variants, from delivering vaccinations and from continuing – for now – to stay at home and stay apart as much as possible and in as many ways as possible.
- To preserve new flexibility, we need to continue to act in ways that sustain it.

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