

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
March 22, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Chief Pegg, and good afternoon.
- Today I am reporting 509 new cases of COVID-19.
- 258 people are in the hospital, following 12 new admissions.
- 51 people are in the ICU.
- I'm grateful that, today, I have no deaths to report to you.
- The current number of cases screened positive for variants of concern is 5,428.
- When I reported to you last Wednesday, this figure was 3,920.
- Since last Thursday, we have seen almost 2,800 additional cases of COVID-19.
- Toronto's current 7-day moving average is 450 cases, up from 420 cases last week.
- Our effective reproductive number is 1.1, which means our outbreak is growing.
- Our percent positivity – the percentage of all COVID-19 tests performed that are actually positive – is 5 per cent. Last week, this figure was 4.3 per cent.
- 50 per cent of all COVID-19 cases are now variants of concern – up from 44 per cent a week ago.
- Our data, while sobering, is moderate compared to what is happening as a result of sharply rising cases elsewhere in the world.

- As I read the news coverage over the weekend, it was common to see descriptions like "skyrocketing" and characterizations like "in the grip of a third wave."
- Reports from Hungary cite record-high daily cases and record deaths.
- The only retail permitted in Hungary at present are stores selling food, pharmacies and gas stations.
- France has just imposed a new month long lockdown on Paris and other parts of the north.
- COVID-19 variants now represent 75 per cent of cases in Paris.
- Poland is in lockdown for three weeks. The variants there are reported to account for 60 per cent of infections.
- Germany is considering the extension of lockdown provisions for an additional four weeks. The head of Germany's infectious disease institute said that cases are growing at an exponential rate.
- I am emphasizing data and developments today that should make us all think twice – to temper expectations about changes to our lives in the short term, to encourage Torontonians to proceed cautiously in the next few weeks, and to protect yourself. By doing so, we will be able to sustain our current circumstances and allow for more choice in where we go and what we do. If we fail to proceed cautiously, we will have fewer choices, fewer choices available in an effort to limit the risk of infection.
- Vaccines are providing hope, and with good reason. Just last week, the Toronto vaccination sites administered almost 102,000 doses of vaccine from March 15 to 21 alone. We will get through this. But at present there are still more of us waiting for our vaccinations, than have received vaccination.
- In British Columbia, COVID-19 outbreaks have been declared in long-term care homes where more than 80 per cent of residents have been vaccinated.

- With that in mind, I want each Torontonians to remember two important things.
- First, vaccines, while highly effective, do not entirely eliminate the risk of COVID-19 infection.
- Second, if you have been vaccinated, there remains a window of vulnerability while your body responds to the vaccine and builds the antibodies to protect you from COVID-19.
- The general understanding is that the body starts producing meaningful, protective antibodies by about two weeks after vaccination and has generated substantial protective antibodies in about four weeks.
- This is a reminder that the vaccination doesn't produce instant protection – and there are many of us waiting to be vaccinated who are at risk of serious illness if infected by COVID-19.
- The good news from British Columbia is that the illnesses in the long term care homes are reported to be mild, which is a positive indication.
- Our data in Toronto tells us that in wave two, people aged 70 years and over not living in long-term care or retirement homes made up only seven per cent of cases.
- However, this same group represented 50 per cent of hospitalizations, 40 per cent of ICU admissions and 45 per cent of deaths.
- So two things are important in that respect.
- First, it is important that those invited to book vaccination appointments do book those vaccination appointments.
- Access to appointments opened today for those 75 and older.
- If you have someone close to you who is 75 or older, discuss their plans with them and help them as needed to book an appointment and to arrive at their vaccination appointment.

- Secondly, we all have a clear and important part to play as vaccines are delivered, more people become eligible, and the days pass between vaccination and protection.
- While I anticipate and am hopeful for a more relaxed summer, it's vital to remember it's still March. Summer is weeks away. Our current numbers and the exponential resurgence of COVID-19 around the world is a grave concern.
- Things can yet go right or go very wrong, depending on what we do while we wait.
- It can be difficult and confusing to remember that as we see the vaccines rolling out at high speed in the U.K. and the U.S.
- In Toronto we are delivering the vaccines we have as quickly as we possibly can.
- So is every other place on earth.
- The demand for vaccine supply is unprecedented.
- The delivery of what is available is in the very, very early going.
- So while it is right to be optimistic about what the vaccine means for you when you get it, it's necessary to remember the benefits are only reaching a limited percentage of people right now and that each vaccination takes time to protect the person who got it.
- Most importantly, the rest of us have to remember we're not vaccinated yet, and that as we take advantage of being outside in warmer weather, our protection lies in well-fitted masks and distance in every way we can create it.