

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
March 15, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

-
- Thank you, Chief, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 387 new cases of COVID-19. 282 people are in hospital, and 49 people are in ICU. I'm sorry to have to report 2 additional deaths today.
 - Sadly, this means that to-date we've lost a total of 2,721 loved ones from our community to COVID-19.
 - It was only a couple of months ago on January 7th of this year that we passed 2,000 deaths in our city.
 - On February 8th I shared with you that “we are in a transition from one pandemic to another – a transition to a new pandemic.” This was after it was confirmed that the U.K. variant - B.1.1.7 was in Toronto.
 - Since that period in early February, 3,516 COVID-19 cases have screened positive for virus mutations.
 - We should all be concerned by what we're seeing - both here in Toronto and when we look around the world.
 - We have many reasons to be optimistic with the news of increased supply of vaccine, but I must be clear – the pandemic is not over.
 - The COVID-19 variants are triggering third waves in Europe.
 - Several countries are imposing new lockdowns or restrictions.
 - Italy – where we all recall the shocking death toll at the beginning of the pandemic a year ago – locked down a majority of the country again today.
 - Cases there were up 10% over the last week.

- All of Italy will be locked down until the Easter weekend to reduce the spread of the variants during a time when people are often together as congregants to worship or as family marking the holiday.
- Italy isn't alone.
- German officials have acknowledged a third wave.
- France has increased restrictions, with pressure rising around the idea of another lockdown.
- Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic are also seeing case counts that are beginning to match previous highs.
- All of this is attributed to the spread of COVID-19 variants.
- Here in Toronto the variants raise the question about where we go from here.
- A decision will be made this week about where we best fit in the provincial COVID-19 response framework.
- I want to be clear, I only recommend restrictions when they are necessary to protect the greatest number of people from widespread risk of infection.
- I share everyone's desire to get back to normal.
- From a public health perspective, employment is one of the key determinants of physical and mental health.
- We often refer to the toll the pandemic is taking on mental health.
- My concern is how it affects everyone. Even at its mildest, the stress of living in this state of suspended animation is a burden.
- Overall, I'm also concerned by the numbers I see.



Public Health

- Toronto's 7-day moving average for new COVID-19 cases is now sitting at 420, up from 354 on the 9th of March.
- The reproductive number for variants of concern is 1.2 and the reproductive number for overall cases is 1.1.
- The percentage of tests coming back positive for COVID-19 has increased slightly to 4.3.
- The most recent figures Toronto Public Health received that measure device time at home show a decline to 78.6% – meaning fewer people are staying close to home.
- The data also indicated more Torontonians were travelling to areas where restrictions were lower.
- We're on the move again, and although the risks remain, in some respects they are higher than ever because of COVID-19 variants.
- I'm sharing this as a reminder that what we all do in our daily lives going forward is the key to preventing, or at least limiting, the spread of variants.
- And the single most important thing anybody can do to protect themselves and those around them is to get vaccinated as soon as they are eligible.
- While we have yet to see a sufficient and steady supply of vaccines for Toronto, our local supply is increasing and if you are amongst those eligible for vaccination I urge you to book your appointment.
- If you have a parent, relative, friend or neighbour over 80 years of age, please check in on them – please reach out to find out if they need help making arrangements for their vaccine, or help to get to their appointment.



Public Health

- I also ask that you help to remind people of the benefit of this protection from COVID-19. If you have questions about vaccines, I encourage you to speak with your family physician, or visit our website or other credible information source.
- The pandemic is not over. It will be – we are nearing the finish line – but we’re not there yet.
- I know everybody is tired of hearing we’re almost there and frustrated with living as we are required to live in order to protect ourselves and protect the people around us.
- I share everyone’s desire to get back to normal.
- Let's aim for a good summer. Let's finish strong by continuing to practice the steps for self-protection. This is a choice that only we can make for ourselves and for those around us, while vaccination efforts ramp up in our community.

-30-

Media contact: tphmedia@toronto.ca