• 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.
• 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.
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.

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