

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
April 26, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good afternoon.
- Today I am reporting 1,101 new cases of COVID-19.
- There are 1,085 people in hospital.
- 231 of them are in the ICU.
- Sadly, I am reporting 12 more deaths to COVID-19.
- We have now seen 3,023 lives lost to COVID-19 in Toronto, having crossed the 3,000 mark on Sunday.
- In the past five days, we have seen 6,090 new cases of COVID-19 and 418 people admitted to hospital.
- There are two stories unfolding at the same time – good news and bad news on parallel tracks – the unrelenting toll the COVID-19 variants are taking and the success we are seeing in delivering vaccinations.
- In the health care system the heavy stress and emotional burdens continue, yet our access to vaccines is improving and increasing. We anticipate that will continue, even if we cannot promise it will be entirely smooth-sailing each week.
- The hotspot strategy is yielding significant results in delivering vaccinations in areas where the threat of spread is greatest.
- Vaccination coverage – meaning the number of people living in the area who've received a first dose – increased in all of the 13 hotspot postal codes, from an average of 10.8% coverage as of April 1st to 28.3% as of April 22nd.

- On Friday, the province's Science Advisory Table urged a focus on prioritizing vaccinations in places where rates of transmission are high.
- It estimated a focus on hotspot neighbourhoods will reduce hospitalizations and deaths.
- This is the kind of outcome that benefits every person in Toronto because we are in this period of high infectiousness, high transmission and consequently of high risk.
- In terms of case counts, we will eventually trend in the right direction.
- But we aren't trending there yet.
- That is why public health measures remain strictly necessary and why even the vaccinated have to tread very carefully for many weeks to come.
- Last Friday, a new Section 22 Class Order took effect that applies to workplaces with COVID-19 outbreaks.
- Today, my team reviewed the findings of investigations underway.
- There will be eight partial closures, in instances where the findings indicate the entire operation does not need to shut down.
- There will be four full closures.
- Instructions to these organizations are underway today.
- Once they have received written notice the instructions require immediate action.
- At that point we will provide the names of the enterprises directed under the Order.

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- We will begin to post business closures later today, after they have been properly notified. After today we will update business closures each Thursday, when we also publish the status of workplace outbreaks, unless there are circumstances where we need to provide public notification.
- I hope people find reassurance in the existence of this Order.
- It is meant to reduce risk on a carefully applied basis.
- Any application will be the result of what public health investigation provides.
- In that respect, there is a distinction between risks as it pertains to workplace closures versus public exposure that's worth clarifying.
- Remember last fall that we issued public advisories in cases where people needed to know they may have been exposed at a place of business.
- When there is a risk of public exposure we will continue to make those announcements.
- We've been fortunate that the measures in place have prevented that need for some time now.
- It comes at a cost, but it produces a benefit by preventing exposures, outbreaks, illness and virus spread.
- The purpose of the new Order is to separate people who may be infecting each other throughout duration of the work day and then taking those infections home, which under the stay at home order is where most people should be spending the majority of their time these days when they can.
- In our experience tracking workplace, at this time the majority of the workplaces where the new Order would apply will not often or usually be places where the general public goes.

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- So the priority – the real difference the Order seeks to make – is in getting employees apart first and reducing the threat of subsequent spread and serious illness to their families and those they see regularly where they live, because the majority are working in places with no public access or public access greatly limited by the stay at home order or by operating requirements in place to support infection prevention and control.
- At this point in the pandemic, given the extent and the ease of transmission everywhere, I'm reluctant to characterize case counts as plateauing.
- Whatever the trend in case counts I am certain of this: while 13- or 14- or 1,500 daily cases is certainly worse than a thousand, a thousand cases a day is never going to be anything to feel good about and certainly not something that we can accept.
- If we are to bring the third wave under control – or have a real hope of the kind of summer we all crave – there is a lot of work to be done.
- The Section-22 Class Order is one targeted tool of many.
- The vaccination campaign is another.
- The outcome will be the sum of the many parts that we draw on as we seek to blunt the impact of the variants and surging virus spread in Toronto. With hard work and patience over time, we can all help to reduce the surge and restore true public health for everyone in Toronto.