

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
May 17, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Chief Pegg, and good afternoon.
- Today I am reporting 1,837 new cases of COVID-19 over the last three days, averaging 612 new cases daily.
- 1,011 people are in the hospital.
- 271 people are in the ICU.
- I am saddened to report 24 deaths today.
- Where COVID-19 is concerned there is often a gap between appearance and reality.
- Today I want to talk about the variants believed to have originated in India and which are increasingly making headlines all over the world – and rightly so.
- These variants are now present in about forty countries – including ours.
- These new variants are raising a significant amount of worry in the United Kingdom which today is almost fully reopening. Hotels, indoor dining, the pubs – all are opening again.
- Cases of the variant have doubled in the U.K. in a little more than a week – from roughly 500 to over 1,300.
- The government’s scientific advisors there believe it is a realistic possibility the variant is as much as 50 per cent -more transmissible than B.1.1.7, which was first identified in the United Kingdom.

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- Early information suggests there may be some reduction in protection given by vaccines or by naturally acquired immunity from past infection. But overall, it's still good news if you're vaccinated; it is something to think about if you're not.
- The World Health Organization has called it a global concern.
- The last public reporting identified 36 cases in Ontario linked to these variants.
- Last February, as we anticipated the U.K.'s B.1.1.7 variant, I told you that the prospect of exponential growth had me as worried as I had ever been during the pandemic.
- Regretfully, the last few months unfolded as so many feared.
- I'm not predicting the emerging variants will do in Ontario what B.1.1.7 is still doing – but I accept it's possible and we should do all we can to prevent history from repeating itself.
- The infectious new variants are here and we should act as individuals in that knowledge. As vaccinations increase, as we hear of opening up in other places and as our weather improves, the temptation could be to get ahead of ourselves.
- At this point, I expect there will be more mixing between people in the coming weeks, especially given the warmer weather.
- In Toronto we have people in three different situations.
- There's the fully vaccinated: a relatively small number of people who have received both doses of a two dose vaccine.
- Second, the partially vaccinated: the large and growing number of people who have received their first dose of a two dose regime.
- Their risk of infection is reduced, the ability to come through an infection with mild illness is greatly enhanced, but their capacity to continue to transmit the

infection is not entirely eliminated – the partly vaccinated can still make other people sick.

- Ant this brings us to the third group: the unvaccinated.
- The Mayor announced today that 60 per cent of people 18 years and older in Toronto have received at least their first dose of vaccine.
- But when you consider the entire population of the city – which includes children under 12, who aren't eligible for vaccination – just over 50 per cent of people have had a first dose.
- That's a considerable number of people still at risk and they need to continue to practice the steps for self-protection.
- In any form, COVID-19 is nimble and stories from around the world tell us that it isn't in full retreat.
- Every new infection is a new opportunity for COVID-19 to mutate.
- So it is the unvaccinated we need to think of in the next weeks and months and that is the gap between appearance and reality I am speaking of today.
- Addressing the gap is a simple and familiar prescription. It's getting a vaccine as soon as you can, and the diligent practice of the steps for self-protection.
- Keep a safe distance from people you don't live with, minimize unnecessary contact with people you don't live with, spend as much time as you can outdoors, be mindful of ventilation, and wear your mask when you can't keep a distance.
- These steps should be routine in the homestretch and should do the bulk of the heavy lifting as we head toward a new normal.

- The news out of the United States and the United Kingdom illustrates what a new normal looks like – and compared to the last year or so I think we can all agree it looks really good and a lot like what we’re used to.
- But we’re not the United States or the United Kingdom yet.
- We can be – if we keep taking those protective measures to limit spread while we build up our vaccinated population and our bodies’ ability to prevail over the virus.
- I have a challenge for everyone today, beyond the steps for self-protection.
- More and more, we’re asking everyone we talk to: have you been vaccinated yet?
- My challenge is don’t stop at asking. Move on to acting, especially now that almost everyone is eligible to sign up for a vaccination.
- People listen to people they know. People gain confidence from the experiences of people they trust.
- So act to encourage the unvaccinated to change that.
- Act to help people get a booking.
- Act to help them get comfortable with vaccination if they’re hesitant.
- By stepping in to help and encourage and getting people talking and thinking, we can make as big a difference as we can by self-protecting.
- Because the more we drive the vaccination numbers higher the better off we are – sooner.