

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
September 29, 2021 at 1 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

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- Thank you Mayor Tory and good afternoon.
 - Before going into today's COVID-19 update, I would like to make a few remarks as we are on the eve of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.
 - Public Health works in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, so we often have the privilege of experiencing the uniqueness of Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing.
 - There are few people who have been so immeasurably wronged, and yet who retain such great capacity for resilience. I want to acknowledge the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, the survivors and intergenerational survivors of the residential and day school systems, although it is difficult to find words that do justice to all this day is meant to represent.
 - In terms of COVID-19, the Mayor is right that we're on the right track and that our progress forward needs protection.
 - While we're seeing comparatively modest case counts at a seven-day moving average below 150, we are again on the verge of a risky and uncertain period in the pandemic.
 - If transmission rates stay the same, Toronto Public Health is modelling daily case counts at around 130 cases per day in early December.
 - If we were to see a 20% increase in transmission rates, we model 600 cases per day by early December.
 - On that basis we would see almost 20,000 cases in December.

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- Before then, cases would have risen consistently, probably aggressively, throughout the fall.
- It would make for a very complicated holiday season and New Year.
- Bearing that in mind, we have been fortunate in terms of the cases in schools, given the potential risk.
- At last count there were 13 active school outbreaks, and 143 investigations underway into suspect cases.
- This out of roughly 1,200 schools in Toronto. This is further proof that vaccines work, that masking works, and that distancing measures work.
- Nonetheless, there is a significant population of students, those under age 12, who are vulnerable because they cannot be vaccinated at this time.
- At this time, children between the ages of 4 and 11 are seeing weekly infection rates of approximately 64 cases per 100,000.
- This situation should change when, as anticipated, regulatory authorities approve vaccine for children between 5 and 11 years of age, and we can begin delivering vaccinations to them.
- As has been reported recently, scientific assessments of COVID-19 vaccines in 5 to 11 year olds have found this is a safe course of action that will offer protection against disease to children and to the rest of us. We understand that protection for one is protection for all.
- Throughout the city, it would be easy to take a more relaxed view and to mistake current case counts as an indication of what is to come.
- While our modelling at Toronto Public Health and new modelling released yesterday by Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table both show the potential for wide ranges from best to worst case scenarios, nothing is guaranteed.

- And experience tells us that in terms of case counts that we should anticipate that after Thanksgiving weekend, and once the cold weather sets in and we see each other more indoors, that COVID cases will rise yet again.
- Currently, there are approximately 189,000 people between the ages of 30 and 49 who are eligible but have yet to be vaccinated.
- They aren't the only people, but as an age group they paint a telling picture.
- It's reasonable to assume they will become infected with COVID-19 and likely with the Delta variant.
- Many of them are parents. Our data shows that at present for children, the most common setting for infection is at home.
- If too many of the unvaccinated get sick at the same time, it could be catastrophic for the health care system.
- We're seeing elsewhere in Canada what happens when the Delta variant gains the upper hand on a large scale. It explodes. The consequences are painful and, in health care, they force potentially devastating choices for healthcare staff about who gets care and who doesn't.
- That scenario in Toronto is unnecessary.
- The majority of those unvaccinated can be protected from illness by changing their status and getting vaccinated.
- It's only too late once you're sick.
- So for the foreseeable future, choose wisely, carefully and selectively when it comes to getting together and celebrating.
- Wear your mask and keep your distance when in public and especially in crowds and when indoors.

- Plan the safest Thanksgiving you can. It's too bad we have to urge caution again, but once more this year, caution is a must.
- I hope that next year, we'll really have something to celebrate.
- For those of you who are unvaccinated, change your status. Please -- get your vaccinations. The Delta variant is out there and you're an easy target for it.
- Looking at the calendar, we can see that we are approaching the holidays and seasons where COVID-19 can run rampant if we don't stand in its way.
- My concern is that those who are vulnerable will fall victim. The consequences of that, COVID-19 has shown us, are unpredictable.
- It doesn't have to happen and it can be prevented – if we make the right choices now and through the fall and winter that preserve the success we're seeing.

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