

## Update on COVID-19

Chief Pegg, Fire Chief & General Manager of Emergency Management

**January 25, 2022 at 11:30 a.m.**

Members Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W

Good morning.

I am pleased to report that we are continuing to see a favourable trend, across our emergency services, with respect to unplanned absences as a result of COVID-19.

Over the past 3 weeks, our unplanned absence rates in both Paramedic Services and Fire Services have continued to decrease each week.

In Fire Services, our operating unplanned absence rate has improved from 9.7% during the week of Dec 23<sup>rd</sup> to 3.5% to date this week.

Likewise, in Paramedic Services, our operating unplanned absence rate has improved from 19.3% during the week of Dec 23<sup>rd</sup> to 7.8% to date this week.

This is testament to the effectiveness of the unplanned absence mitigation strategies that each of our City services have been implementing since the outset of the Omicron wave of COVID-19.

With all active City staff being fully vaccinated against COVID-19, Toronto has continued to provide emergency, essential and critical services in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

I would like to once again acknowledge and thank each and every member of our team who continues to report for duty each day, accept extended and overtime shifts as required, and for going above and beyond to ensure the continued delivery of the services that our residents rely on each day.

Yesterday, our emergency and essential services operated with an average unplanned absence rate of 7.3%.

Between December 24<sup>th</sup> and January 24<sup>th</sup>, our emergency and essential services operated with an average unplanned absence rate of 12.1%.

From a City-wide perspective, yesterday, we operated with an average unplanned absence rate of 5.2% across all the City divisions.

Yesterday, Toronto Paramedic Services operated with 120 Ambulances on the road and an unplanned absence rate of 7.8%.

Also, yesterday, Toronto Fire Services operated with all 124 frontline trucks and crews in service and an unplanned absence rate of 3.5%.

Fire Services are continuing to respond to additional low priority paramedic calls each day, where there is no clear indication of a patient or injury.

Each of our other emergency, essential and critical services, including Toronto Police, Toronto Water, TTC, Shelter Support and Housing, Senior Services and Long-Term Care, Children's Services and our City-operated COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics also continue to provide exceptional service to Toronto residents, and I thank them also.

As the situation with COVID-19 has evolved, so have our planning and response, and this work is continuing every day.

In closing today, I would like to acknowledge that tomorrow is *Bell Let's Talk* day, in support of mental health.

*Bell Let's Talk* is a wide-reaching, multi-year program designed to break the silence around mental illness and support mental health, all across Canada.

Tomorrow, on Bell Let's Talk Day, Bell will donate even more towards mental health initiatives in Canada by contributing 5¢ for every applicable text, call, tweet or TikTok video using the *#BellLetsTalk* hashtag, social media video view and use of their Facebook frame or Snapchat lens.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges associated with mental health have increased across our City and beyond.

Continuing to do my part, and using the public platform that I am afforded as Toronto's Fire Chief to further eliminate the stigma associated with getting professional help to both get healthy and stay healthy, is very important to me.

Over the course of my life, and my career as a first responder, I have witnessed the realities of stress injuries firsthand.

I have also seen far too many examples where good people are afraid to speak up, reach out or seek help when they need it, for fear of being stigmatized or looked down on, as a result.

There is nothing weak about seeking help to maintain your mental health.

In fact, from my perspective, this is one of the true indicators of strength.

While it often feels like an overused statement, it is okay - not to be okay.

It is also okay to be okay.

The stresses of life, work and family affect each of us in different ways, and at different times, and there is no standardized nor correct response to any particular event or situation.

The same situation or event will affect everyone in different way and at different times.

COVID-19 has taken a toll on the mental health of many, as these pressures add to the already often-heavy loads being carried by so many of our family members, friends, colleagues and residents.

Ensuring that I continue to remain resilient and strong, has been an important factor in maintaining my ability to bring the very best that I have to offer to my role as Fire Chief, and as the City of Toronto's Incident Commander for COVID-19, each and every day.

In days gone by, it would have been considered a sign of weakness for a Fire Chief to speak openly about mental health, let alone for a Fire Chief to "admit" that they seek the services of a psychologist in order to remain mentally strong and resilient.

I want you to know that I feel absolutely no shame, no embarrassment and no fear in being open about the fact that I work with a psychologist who helps me remain mentally healthy, strong and resilient.

In fact, my next appointment with him is scheduled for next week, and I am looking forward to checking in, and to make sure that I continue to remain strong and resilient.

In response to the challenges associated with COVID-19, these meetings pivoted from being held in person to online, and I find both formats equally beneficial and effective.

I share that with you today, in hopes that even one person might feel empowered to reach out, or to ask for help to maintain their own mental health and resilience, because if it is okay for me, it is okay for you too.

Tomorrow, on Bell Let's Talk day, let's all do our part to raise much needed money for mental health in Canada.

Let's also do our part to make conversations about mental health and wellness as common and comfortable as the discussions we have about COVID-19 and other illnesses.

Take a minute to check in with the people your care about and to check in with yourself too, and if you need help or supports to maintain your health and resilience, seek out that help without fear or hesitation.

Thank you.