

Update on COVID-19

Chief Pegg, Fire Chief & General Manager of Emergency Management

January 4, 2022 at 12:00 p.m.

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

Throughout the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have evolved and expanded our COVID-19 Incident Management System as the situation changes.

Our COVID-19 strategic command team has been hard at work throughout the holiday period, planning for the anticipated increases in the number of staff who may be unable to be at work – either due to illness, isolation or needing to look after someone who is ill.

Throughout our response to COVID-19, the City has deployed staff to meet the highest priority needs as they arise, and this work is continuing.

In anticipation of an increasing number of staff absences that Omicron may cause, we fully reactivated our Emergency Operations Centre on December 16, on a proactive basis, including the business continuity task force and the PPE management task force.

The live-time planning and response, that we are doing right now, revolves around ensuring adequate staffing for essential services including city-operated vaccination clinics, shelters, the 10 City-operated long-term care homes, Toronto Water and Children's services.

As the mayor said, non-critical City services may also be impacted either by absences due to illness or by the need for those staff to isolate.

The public, though, should be absolutely assured that we will continue to provide the emergency and critical services that we all rely on every day.

Critical operations to ensure the provision of safe drinking water continues, as do garbage collection and snow clearing to name a few.

Likewise, Toronto's emergency services will continue to respond to emergency calls without interruption.

Higher risk and higher priority emergency incidents will always be responded to first, before lower risk and lower priority calls.

Response times, particularly for low priority calls, may increase from pre-pandemic levels, however each of the City's emergency services are proactively deploying resources to deal with absences, ensuring that the City remains safe.

Each of our emergency services are prioritizing calls and proactively deploying resources, as they do every day of the year, to deal with unplanned absences.

Toronto Fire Services and Toronto Paramedic Services, for example, have adjusted their response protocols such that Fire Services are responding to additional low priority paramedic calls and are responding to calls where there is no clear indication of an injury or patient requiring transport by Paramedics.

If there is a patient requiring the advanced care of a paramedic or transport to hospital, Firefighters will initiate patient care and immediately notify paramedics for emergency response.

This allows paramedics to respond to high priority emergency medical calls in the shortest amount of time possible.

The current COVID-19 situation, resulting in higher than normal numbers of staff unable to be at work, is something emergency services around the world are dealing with today, in response to the rise and rapid global spread of the Omicron variant.

The City of Toronto's emergency services have best-in-class contingency and business continuity protocols in place, to ensure the city is always safe.

This includes the use of overtime and shift extensions to mitigate unplanned absences; 9-1-1 and emergency incident triaging; and the dynamic deployment of resources, including both people and equipment, to immediately respond to high priority emergencies.

Innovative and responsive action is being taken to ensure that emergency services continue without interruption.

There is no doubt that the spread of the Omicron variant is challenging all of us like never before.

But our emergency, essential and critical services are meeting those challenges head on.

I extend my sincere thanks to each and every member of Team Toronto who continues to give their absolute all, as we respond to these challenges together.

From those on the frontlines of service delivery, to those ensuring that uninterrupted vaccine clinic operations continue, to each and every member of Team Toronto who are taking on new and additional work to ensure that we continue to deliver the services our residents need and rely on the most – thank you one and all.

And to every resident and business owner in Toronto who continue to follow public health guidance, who get their vaccinations as soon as they can, and who continue to endure so much as we battle COVID-19 – thank you most.

We are going to beat COVID-19 and we are going to do that together.

Thank you.