

June 8, 2020

Statement on Provincial Re-opening Measures

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything we have experienced before. As a city, we have had to rapidly adapt much of our lives in recent months to reduce virus spread and flatten the curve.

We have been guided through this by the compassionate leadership of Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Eileen de Villa, and the 1,800 staff members at Toronto Public Health, who have worked tirelessly around the clock to respond to this virus.

To put it simply, this has been an exceptionally difficult time. Nearly everyone in this city – from front-line workers putting themselves at risk, to residents trying to do the right thing by staying at home – is feeling the strain.

Today, the Ontario Government announced plans for a second stage of re-opening businesses and other activities that were closed to slow the spread of COVID-19. I am relieved that the Province has agreed to adopt a regional approach based on local indicators. This is critically important. Here in Toronto and in the Greater Toronto Area, we are still seeing many new cases of COVID-19 each day, and we need to proceed slowly and cautiously.

But we can't stay locked in our homes forever. The reality for Toronto and Ontario is that we are going to have to learn to live with the ongoing threat of COVID-19. The virus will not go away next week, next month, or even likely next year. This is a risk we will all have to manage every single day. As the Province and cities re-open, we will see more cases of COVID-19. We will experience new outbreaks, and we will, sadly, see deaths. With no vaccine or proven treatment for this virus, this is inevitable. Our residents, in particular the most vulnerable, are counting on us to proceed with caution.

Let me be clear: learning to live with the threat of COVID-19 does not mean accepting needless risk or unnecessary deaths. All of us – governments, individuals, businesses, and organizations – can and must do our part to keep the virus under control.

I continue to have concerns that the Ontario Government is not moving quickly enough to address major public health requirements to support safely returning to more normal life and activities.

We need a province-wide testing and lab reporting system that is nimble and responsive, and can handle increases in cases and expedite contact tracing.

We need information and analysis on which groups of people are most at risk of contracting COVID-19, and proactive measures in place to protect them.

We need public health data and re-opening criteria that is open and accessible to the public, so we can know exactly where we are in our fight against this pandemic.

It is vitally important that we continue to preserve the public's trust in government decision-making. Governments need to make it clear that our decisions will not put people at unnecessary risk. This will only be possible if we provide clear and transparent evidence and rationale every step of the way.

I believe that Toronto and other cities must adopt the Province's re-opening measures cautiously, while taking stronger proactive actions to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. The City of Toronto staff in the Office of Recovery and Rebuild have been working hard to plan for our eventual re-opening. Every single department and division is engaged in this work. Toronto Public Health's Recovery Team has worked non-stop to prepare a risk analysis of each of our City operations, and to develop guidelines and measures to mitigate risk. Toronto Public Health has developed a detailed set of recovery indicators to inform the public on the status of the pandemic, and on benchmarks required to re-open.

Living with COVID-19 means living with risk, yes, but also doing everything we can to protect one another, and in particular, to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities. Re-opening must be a gradual process that we re-assess each step of the way. These continue to be unprecedented times – but with a measured approach, we can balance the risks and help to keep people safe.



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