

August 31, 2020

## **Statement from Board of Health Chair Joe Cressy on COVID-19 Resurgence Planning**

Today, our Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa provided an update on Toronto Public Health's planning for a potential resurgence of the COVID-19 virus that could take place this coming fall and winter season.

Since January 2020, Toronto Public Health has been working around the clock to respond to COVID-19 and keep our city safe. Acting on recommendations from our public health experts, the City took swift and decisive action to limit virus spread earlier this year. These actions, along with restrictions from the Federal and Provincial governments and the cooperation and sacrifice of Torontonians, were successful in reducing transmission, limiting community spread, and protecting our health care system.

While our success in reducing the spread of COVID-19 has made it possible to re-open many businesses and services, we are not out of the woods yet. Without a treatment or vaccine on the immediate horizon, we need to prepare ourselves for many more months of this pandemic. We cannot let our guard up. Still, while learning to live with COVID-19 circulating may be the new normal, accepting a significant second wave doesn't have to be.

This time, we can build on the lessons learned during the first wave of COVID-19. These lessons include the importance of physical distancing, wearing masks and face coverings, hand-washing, and limits on crowds and large groups, along with the key role of rapid testing and contact tracing. We also learned that access to data is critical in understanding exactly how COVID-19 is impacting different communities across our city.

Our team at Toronto Public Health, along with other City staff, has been hard at work planning for the next stage of our response to COVID-19. Our resurgence plans include approaches based on three different scenarios for COVID-19 activity in our city:

1. A fall/winter peak
2. A series of smaller peaks and valleys, that repeat throughout the season
3. A 'slow burn' ripple effect, where there are continued cases but without a concrete pattern

While we cannot predict which scenario will occur, we are doing absolutely everything in our control to try to create a manageable and safe prolonged ripple effect. This means that while we will continue to see new cases, there will not be surges that cannot be contained or threaten the stability of our health care system.

With this in mind, Toronto Public Health is expanding our case and contact tracing team and enhancing the response model for long term care homes. We are developing multilingual Community Outreach Rapid Response Teams to support organizations and residents in hard-hit communities. And we are finalizing details with the Federal government for a Voluntary

Isolation Centre, which will provide space for people who test positive but can't isolate at home without risking the health and safety of other members of their household.

We are also working to roll out an aggressive flu vaccine program to protect the capacity of our health care system as we head into flu season.

With schools set to reopen in a few weeks, Toronto Public Health is supporting schools and school boards by hiring additional public health nurses to provide on-the-ground support. Staff are also providing advice, training, and education around infection control measures and monitoring protocols within schools. Re-opening schools is a significant challenge, but if we continue to follow the advice of our public health experts, I believe we can do everything possible to keep students and staff safe.

Today's update demonstrates how much work is going into preventative planning, to ensure that we can continue to successfully combat this pandemic. Ultimately, though, our continued success depends on the individual commitment of every Torontonians. As our Medical Officer of Health has said, our actions now will directly affect what COVID-19 activity looks like in our city in the coming months.

That is why we must remain vigilant, and continue to do our part. This means, in the coming months, keeping our distance with anyone outside our immediate bubble, wearing our masks, washing our hands, getting a flu shot, and doing all we can to protect ourselves and each other.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Cressy', with a long, sweeping underline.

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