

September 11, 2020

Statement from Board of Health Chair Joe Cressy on Launch of COVID-19 Voluntary Isolation Site

Everyone should be able to protect their families from COVID-19 – regardless of where they live, how much money they make, or how many bedrooms and bathrooms are in their home.

Today, I'm pleased to join Mayor John Tory, our Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa, and federal Minister of Health Patty Hajdu in marking the launch of Toronto's voluntary isolation site, which will open tomorrow, September 12. This facility, which is operated and staffed by Toronto Public Health, provides a safe space for people who test positive for COVID-19 but cannot isolate at home without putting their family or other members of their household at risk. It is the first facility of its kind in Canada.

This program would not be possible without the generous support of our federal partners, who have provided \$13.9 million for the site to operate over the next year. I want to especially recognize the commitment of Minister Hajdu and Deputy Prime Minister Freeland to making this site a reality.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, doctors and public health experts have said that if a person tests positive for COVID-19, they should self-isolate at home, in a separate bedroom and bathroom from other household members. Many Toronto households, however, do not have this luxury. When individuals do not have enough space to self-isolate apart from family members, the risk of household transmission of COVID-19 is high.

Preliminary data analysis has revealed that COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting lower-income households, people who identify as members of a racialized group, and individuals who live in households with five or more people. For these households, a safe place to go away from home can make all the difference between containing the virus and infecting an entire family, including members who may be high-risk.

The voluntary isolation site is located in a hotel with a capacity of up to 140 individuals who are isolating for a two-week period.

During case and contact tracing follow-up, Toronto Public Health investigators will interview people who would benefit from the use of the isolation site, and seek their voluntary agreement. These people include individuals who have tested positive but are unable to safely isolate at home, due to living in a small space with a large number of household members, or living with family members who are at high-risk for COVID-19. Family members of a person who tests positive may also be eligible, if they can relocate safely to the site but the person who tested positive cannot.

Clients are required to self-isolate at the facility for up to 14 days, or until they are asymptomatic. At the facility, people will be provided with daily meals, bedding, cleaning, and other incidentals, and will have a regular check in by phone with Toronto Public Health staff.

Isolation sites have been used successfully in New York, Chicago, and Wuhan, China, to reduce community transmission. Toronto has operated two other isolation facilities for people with COVID-19 who are experiencing homelessness since the spring.

We have seen the data that shows that COVID-19, like many infectious diseases, preys on poverty. As we move forward in our response to this pandemic, we must continue to find new and innovative solutions to address inequality and the social determinants of health, in order to help keep everyone safe.

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

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