

September 16, 2020

Toronto Board of Health Members

**Re: Update on Potential Actions in Response to COVID-19 Resurgence**

Dear colleagues,

Over the past six months, Torontonians have done their part. We listened to public health advice and adjusted our behavior, made sacrifices, and looked out for one another. We should be proud of what we accomplished, by flattening the curve and reducing transmission in the spring and summer. But fighting COVID-19 is a marathon, not a sprint – and we still have a long way to go. We can't let up our guard now.

In recent days, we have begun to see signs of deeply concerning resurgence of the COVID-19 virus in our city. The current daily new COVID-19 case count in Toronto has increased over the last 6 days from 52 new cases to a high of 108. The reproductive case number in Toronto is now above 1.2, which means that each case of COVID-19 is leading to more than one additional case. In order to limit transmission, flatten the curve, and sustain re-opening measures require us to get our reproductive number below 1.

With the reopening of businesses and services, and increases on social gathering limits as part of Stage 3 measures, there has been upward pressure on cases. Part of this is the inevitable result of opening our city back up. But as our Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa has noted, of particular concern is the increase in people socializing with others outside of their household, without physical distancing or wearing a mask. Events like small weddings and family reunions are putting people at risk – Toronto Public Health is currently investigating four weddings that have resulted in at least 22 infections. Even small social gatherings, like playdates and backyard barbecues, are leading to cases. Toronto Public Health is also seeing a rise in infections directly connected to bars, restaurants, and other workplaces.

This increase is concerning for parents and families, as many children are returning to school this week for the first time since the spring. When it comes to schools, safety continues to be our top priority. Toronto Public Health is continuing to work directly with the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board to provide recommendations, information and on-the-ground supports to make school openings as safe as possible.

Still, time is of the essence if we want to prevent a big second wave in our city, and be able to keep schools, child care centres, and businesses open. Other jurisdictions and our own experience has shown that fast and quick interventions are critical. To that end we are working internally at Toronto Public Health and the City of Toronto, and with the Ontario Government, on measures that could help to flatten the curve before more severe interventions are required.

Right now, three areas of action are under active discussion. These include:

1. Reductions to social gathering limits
2. Expanding mask or face covering requirements to additional settings
3. Increasing enforcement of existing physical distancing and mask requirements

The City has the authority to pursue some of these actions independently, while others require the support of higher orders of Government. We will continue to work with the other levels of government on areas including on expanding testing capacity, improving the timeliness of the provincial laboratory reporting system, and enhancing surveillance and enforcement of quarantine orders for travelers. In addition, recent recommendations from our Medical Officer of Health focus on improving infection prevention measures in long term care facilities, and working to address the impacts of the pandemic on the most affected communities in our city.

Our Medical Officer of Health and Mayor Tory will continue to provide regular updates on which actions will be put in place in the coming days. By acting quickly now and putting additional measures in place, we can hopefully avoid another lockdown like the one that was required to flatten the curve earlier this year.

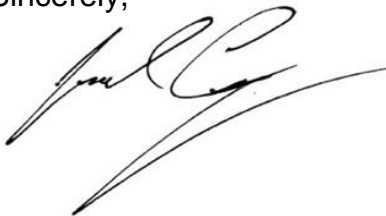
This is a stressful time, and it can be challenging to stay on top of rules and requirements that are changing rapidly. We are still learning about this virus, and working to continually update our response to ensure we are doing everything possible to keep people safe. What we know for certain is that by following these three principles, every resident can help protect themselves and others:

- Watch your physical distance with anyone outside your household;
- Wear a mask or face covering as much as possible; and,
- Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently.

The reality is that COVID-19 is not going away any time soon. But if we continue to work together, we can reduce the number of cases and mitigate the impact of this virus in our city and community.

I look forward to discussing these matters in greater detail at our upcoming Board of Health meeting on Monday, September 21.

Sincerely,

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

Joe Cressy  
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