



2020

Impacts of
COVID-19
on Black
LGBT Youth

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About us

The Domino Project, a peer led for and by Black LGBTTQ+ youth (16-29 years old) in Toronto. This 24-month pilot project funded by OTF's Youth Opportunities Fund and is a joint venture between the Black Queer Youth Collective (BQYC) and Parkdale Queen West Community Health Center (PQWCHC).



**CONTACT
US**

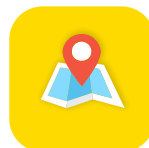
Introducing The Domino Table Talk

On May 25, 2020, the Domino project introduced the Domino Table talk, an eclectic online series consisting of five online discussions. The first discussion focused on the impact of COVID-19 on Black LGBT youth as Ontario grappled with the growing public health concern while new cases continued to surge. To support Black LGBT youth may have been particularly vulnerable during this this, we hosted this virtual discussion to understand how COVID-19 has affected the daily lives of young Black Queer and Trans people who access our program.



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Background

The World Health Organization describes COVID-19 as an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. COVID-19 is now a pandemic affecting many countries globally. On March 11, the World Health Organization declared the global outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic.

Following the direction of public health administrators, the Premier of Ontario made an announcement that all non-essential services are required to close in Ontario as a result, the Domino project which hosted a regular drop-in group for Black Queer and Trans youth on Monday evenings at Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre was revised to comply with the public health guidelines.

* <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/coronavirus-disease-answers?query=what+is+covid19>

Impacts of COVID-19 on Black LGBT Youth

Our youth panel described the following experiences about how COVID-19 has affected their lives.





Public Health Guidelines: Social Distancing And Preventative Measures

Following the announcement of the coronavirus outbreak, the Government of Ontario declared a provincial emergency under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. As part of the infectious disease control, Public health officials shared guidelines to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. These tips recommended that everyone should avoid non-essential trips in the community. Furthermore, people should avoid close contact and keep 6 feet (2 metres) from others while in public.

Tips to Prevent the Spread

The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed:

- Limit non-essential trips out of your home.
- Keep two metres/six feet distance from others.
- Wear a mask or face covering if you can't keep physical distance.
- Clean your hands often. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based (70-90%) hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue. Immediately throw the tissue in the garbage and wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home if you are feeling unwell.

In response to the prevention measures, our panelists shared the following.

Panelist 1 "...trying my hardest to the social distancing, because everyone is like umm... I don't know if you heard about the incident at... ah Trinity Bell Square. [Trinity Bellwood.] I was like... I try. I try to avoid something like that because I know people are not listening to social distancing... like they're treating it as if it's a normal casual thing. So, I'm wearing my mask, I'm wearing my gloves when I do my walk and when I go running."

<p>Compliance with the public health guidelines</p>	<p>Overall, there was a general sense of comfort and ease following the preventative measures. Youth felt relieved knowing that there is more emphasis on hygiene i.e. washing hands, sanitation and no touching"</p> <p>Panelist 1: "Social distancing is great. It works well for me"</p>
<p>Challenges following the social distancing measures</p>	<p>Public transit was identified as a main challenge particularly in neighborhood that are densely populated. Youth expressed fears of violence and exposure of to the virus while collecting essential items and commuting. Some youth also expressed additional concerns for their general health or their loved one's health who may be immuno-compromised.</p> <p>Panelist 1: "It's not good for a lot of people from what I've seen, especially when I'm taking the TTC caused I've seen a lot of things happen on the TTC since COVID-19 start, fight broke out, people breaking bottles, people throwing things so I'm trying less as possible to use public transportation but that's my main source of in terms of getting to work so I don't have a choice."</p> <p>Panelist 3: "Social distancing has been pretty stressful at times. Just in the sense because I want to ensure that I'm giving the proper space and as well as not putting myself at risk ya know for contracting the virus. So for myself, I try to travel during the morning to avoid traffic or groups of people as well as when I do grocery shopping I try to do a large grocery haul to avoid multiple trips which could put myself at risk."</p>

SOCIAL CONNECTION



In general, COVID-19 has negatively impacted access to both formal and informal supports. All panelists expressed feelings of isolation and lack of emotional support from family and friends which has also affected their mental health and social circles. The Domino Project original program model was designed as a drop-in group where Black LGBTTQ+ youth would be able to connect and socialize with each.

Reflecting on how COVID-19 has changed youth social life, Panelist 3, "Before lockdown, I would hang out with friends maybe 2-3 times a week in person, now that lock down has started, I'm lucky if I see a friend maybe once a month... that's been very hard to deal with I guess. It also for some friends, they're not active on social media so I'm lucky if I get one message a week from them which kind of is stressful because I worry about them sometimes."

Additionally, there were mixed reactions with some people feeling more connected to friends and family online. While others feeling more disconnected or less open to connect with people online.

LIFESTYLE ADJUSTMENTS

Black Queer and Trans youth continue to experience challenges related to employment and housing in Toronto. Prior to the pandemic, youth primarily focused on employment and job-related activities. While there are still technological challenges with accessing the internet and virtually supports. The youth panel shared a range of activities they are doing while at home.

PRE-COVID ACTIVITIES

More focused on work
Socializing

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Started exercising
More home cooked meals
Started Yoga
More arts and crafts/sewing
Web series on YouTube
More decorating at home
Playing chess, video games
Spring cleaning
donating unwanted items
Attending online meetings with other BIPOC
Online classes with universities
Doing more community research

COVID—19 and Black LGBTQ + Youth Mental Health



In response to the question, how has COVID-19 changed or reinforced your views on Mental Health, our panel shared the following sentiments.

Panelist 3 “To be honest, I think there's still a lot of stigma when it comes to mental health in the Black community. I think honestly what I've noticed since the lockdown has started, for myself a heightened anxiety and I find myself to be more hypervigilant when going out to do basic things like grocery shopping and you know day to day task, I need to do for myself.”

Panelist 2: “I actually had a roommate that I was living with last year, that was diagnosed with Mental health issues and stuff. They recently just passed away so... They was successful with their attempts to do whatever. But it's like they have been doing stuff prior to COVID-19 whereas they could have been able to go to see their therapist or psychiatrist for the psychiatric treatment available to him and ahh I think after once the lockdown has been initiated, the only kind of support that a lot of people can get is there friends circle.

Overall, while youth have received help from virtual services like counseling, there is a need for a variety of services that support youth's mental support and reduce the feeling is of isolation and loneliness which have negative impacted youth mentally and emotionally.

Long Term Impacts On Daily Life

BENEFITS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased access to online supports• Potentially a safer environment for group and individual support• Increased awareness of the importance of personal finance to sustain themselves in the future• Increased access to e-learning and skills building• Opportunities to try something new or reconnect with an old hobby• Opportunities to start a business or learn more about entrepreneurship• Reduced monthly expenses and impulse shopping• Increased emphasis on physical and mental health well being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth observe racial health inequities regarding consequences for breaching COVID-19 guidelines.• Perceived challenges social distancing in cold weathers while getting essential items (groceries, medications etc.)• Loss of employment and gigs• Travel restrictions have affected youth's ability to visit family outside of the country particularly older folks i.e. their grandparents• Developmental challenges for adolescent who are unable to socialize with peers in the upcoming school year.• Businesses and residences will need to rethink about their current infrastructure to ensure new COVID cases are minimal (this includes the public transit I.e. TTC, GO Transit etc.)

Note: In addition to the challenges above, youth also expressed general concerns and fears about,

- A state sanctioned curfew
- A second wave of new cases because of how poor hygiene
- Fines and convictions for non-compliance in Black communities where unemployment is relatively high
- Reduced service time and capacity at restaurants, pharmacies and grocery stores

Resources

COVID-19 Community and Workplace setting: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/>
COVID-19 Reduce the spread: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-reduce-virus-spread/>

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