

Response to COVID-19 - March 2021 Update

Date: March 8, 2021

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the COVID-19 pandemic locally and the COVID-19 vaccination plan. It also provides an update on Toronto Public Health's (TPH) response to COVID-19 outbreaks in workplaces, including posting information about outbreaks online and strengthening public health measures through a Class Order under Section 22 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

Until March 7, 2021, Toronto was subject to the provincial Stay-at-Home Order and was in the "Shutdown Zone" of the Province's Reopening Ontario Act, Ontario Regulation (O. Reg.) 82/20. On March 8, 2021, the Province moved Toronto into the Grey-Lockdown level. Although cases in the second wave peaked on January 10, 2021, COVID-19 infection remains a risk to residents as the virus continues to circulate and many residents still do not have immunity.

A growing proportion of the COVID-19 cases are variants of concern. COVID-19 variants of concern are more transmissible and are appearing in settings across Toronto, including long-term care homes, hospitals, schools, shelters and workplaces.

TPH's focus continues to be mitigating impacts of COVID-19 variants with appropriate public health measures and vaccinating all Toronto residents who wish to be vaccinated as supply becomes more available.

The City of Toronto is prepared to roll out vaccines to all Toronto residents to protect them from COVID-19 infection. This includes the coordination of immunization clinics offered by other health sector agencies across the city, and readying nine City of Toronto-operated COVID-19 mass-immunization clinics. The COVID-19 Immunization Task Force (ITF) is working to ensure all nine City-operated clinics will be ready to open once the Province provides its registration and booking system and sufficient vaccine supply.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. City Council and the Board of Health request the Ontario Ministry of Health to collect comprehensive socio-demographic and ethnic data on those who obtain the COVID-19 vaccination as part of the Provincial COVID-19 vaccination tracking system (COVaxON) and provide access for Toronto Public Health to analyze this data.
2. City Council and the Board of Health request the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development to continue to provide additional resources and funding for enforcing the Reopening Ontario Act and other workplace safety regulations in Toronto workplaces that will provide ongoing safer working environments beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. City Council and the Board of Health request the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development to continue to undertake ongoing enforcement blitzes of Toronto workplaces to ensure compliance with public health measures and requirements set out in the Reopening Ontario Act.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On January 18, 2021, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on COVID-19: January 2021 Update.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL25.3>

On December 14, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on COVID-19: Update.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL24.2>

On December 14, 2020, the Deputy City Manager delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL24.1>

On November 16, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on the Response to COVID-19: Persevering through Resurgence. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL23.1>

On October 19, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on the Response to COVID-19: Response to Resurgence.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL22.1>

On September 21, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on the Response to COVID-19: Reopening and Preparations for a Potential Resurgence.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL20.1>

On July 26, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a Supplementary Report to City Council on Establishing a COVID-19 Isolation Site.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL18.1>

On July 2, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on an update regarding COVID-19.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL18.1>

On June 8, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health regarding the City of Toronto's COVID-19 Response and Recovery.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL17.1>

On May 7, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a presentation at a special meeting of the Board of Health.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL16.2>

COMMENTS

Status of the COVID-19 Epidemic in Toronto

Until March 7, 2021, Toronto was subject to the provincial Stay-at-Home Order and was in the "Shutdown Zone" of the Province's Reopening Ontario Act, O. Reg. 82/20. On March 8, 2021, the Province moved Toronto into the Grey-Lockdown level. Although cases in the second wave peaked on January 10, 2020, COVID-19 infection remains a risk as the virus continues to circulate and many residents still do not have immunity through vaccination.

New COVID-19 variants of concern that are more transmissible are appearing in settings across Toronto and increasing as a proportion of confirmed cases. Variants have now been identified in long-term care homes, hospitals, schools, shelters and workplace outbreaks.

Toronto Public Health's (TPH's) focus continues to be mitigating impacts of COVID-19 variants with strong public health measures and vaccinating all Toronto residents who wish to be vaccinated as supply becomes more available.

COVID-19 Variants of Concern

A variant of concern is a mutation of the SARS-CoV-2 genome that has public health significance because of a potential for easier spread between people, more severe illness or reduced efficacy of vaccines. The variant B.1.1.7 strain, which was first identified in the United Kingdom, is known to spread more easily between people and potentially may increase the risk of hospitalization and death in cases. Cases of the variants identified in South Africa (B.1.351) and Brazil (P.1) have also been identified in Toronto.

The risks posed by variants reinforce the continued need for public health prevention measures such as staying home as much as possible, wearing a mask when out in public, washing hands often and staying home when sick.

COVID-19 Vaccine Supply

The Federal Government approves, procures and distributes COVID-19 vaccines for Canadians. Approval of the first two vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) came in late-2020. Since their approval, there has been several weeks of constrained COVID-19 vaccine supply.

Health Canada Approves New Vaccines

On February 26, 2021, Health Canada authorized two vaccines: the COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by AstraZeneca, developed in partnership with Oxford University, and the Serum Institute of India's version of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

On March 5, 2021, Health Canada authorized the Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine; this is the first single-dose vaccine to be approved.

With the new vaccine approvals, and Provincial announcement of increased supply from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna in the coming weeks, the City of Toronto, together with health care partners, are prepared to continue to reach additional groups with their first and second doses in accordance with the provincial vaccine prioritization framework and other relevant provincial guidance on COVID-19 vaccine administration.

Provincial Three-Phased Vaccine Distribution Plan

The Province of Ontario is responsible for the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine and has established a [provincial vaccine prioritization framework](#). The Province has laid out a three-phase approach to vaccine distribution.

Phase 1: December 2020 - March 2021

Immediate priorities for first doses include:

- Staff, essential caregivers and any residents who have not yet received a first dose in long-term care homes; high-risk retirement homes; and First Nations elder care homes;
- Alternative level of care patients in hospitals who have a confirmed admission to a long-term care home, retirement home or other congregate care home for seniors;

- Health care workers identified as highest priority, followed by very high priority, in the [Ministry of Health's guidance on Health Care Worker Prioritization](#); and
- Indigenous adults in northern remote and higher risk communities (on-reserve and urban).

When all reasonable steps have been taken to complete first doses of the vaccine for all interested individuals in the immediate category, first doses will be available to the remainder of the Phase 1 populations, including:

- adults 80 years of age and older;
- staff, residents and caregivers in retirement homes and other congregate care settings for seniors (for example, assisted living);
- health care workers identified as the high priority level in the Ministry of Health's guidance on Health Care Worker Prioritization;
- all Indigenous adults;
- adult recipients of chronic home care; and
- People experiencing homelessness.

Phase 2: April to July 2021 (depending on availability of vaccines)

As announced March 5th, 2021, Phase two will focus on vaccinating populations based on age and risk.

- Older adults between 60-79 years of age;
- Individuals with specific health conditions and some primary caregivers;
- People who live and work in congregate settings and some primary caregivers;
- People who live in hot spots with high rates of death, hospitalizations and transmission; and,
- Certain workers who cannot work from home.

Phase 3: July 2021 and beyond (depending on availability of vaccines)

- Adults 59 years and younger.

Update on the City's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan

The City of Toronto is readying nine COVID-19 immunization clinics and 5 mobile clinics. The Immunization Task Force (ITF) is working to ensure all nine City-operated clinics are ready to open once vaccine supply to the City of Toronto is increased and stable.

Immunization Clinic Locations

The nine City-operated clinics will be located at:

1. Metro Toronto Convention Centre, 255 Front St. W.
2. Toronto Congress Centre, 650 Dixon Rd.
3. Malvern Community Recreation Centre, 30 Sewells Rd.
4. The Hangar, 75 Carl Hall Rd.
5. Scarborough Town Centre, 300 Borough Dr.
6. Cloverdale Mall, 250 The East Mall
7. Mitchell Field Community Centre, 89 Church Ave.

8. North Toronto Memorial Community Centre, 200 Eglinton Ave. W.
9. Carmine Stefano Community Centre, 3100 Weston Rd.

A map of City-operated COVID-19 immunization clinics is available on [toronto.ca: https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-to-get-vaccinated/covid-19-where-to-get-vaccinated/](https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-to-get-vaccinated/covid-19-where-to-get-vaccinated/).

Clinics will open to the public, pending vaccine supply and a provincially-run booking system. When fully-operational, these clinics will operate seven days per week, nine hours per day. It is estimated that more than 120,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses can be administered each week through the nine City-operated immunization clinics. The operational plans of the City's clinic are fully scalable, with plans in place to increase the number of vaccines that can be administered monthly from 500,000 to approximately 975,000 as vaccine availability permits. The City has also planned, from the outset, to expand the hours of clinic operations, including to 24 hours – this would also rely on vaccine availability. The clinics will be operated by Toronto Public Health (TPH), with support from other City staff, and will include qualified nursing staff to administer the vaccinations under appropriate medical oversight.

The clinics are in strategically-located areas of the city and are part of an overall Vaccination Program that includes mobile clinic and response team models to ensure priority neighbourhoods and vulnerable populations have access to immunization. City of Toronto immunization models are part of a wider community plan that involves health sector partners, such as hospitals and other community health organizations, and whose plans similarly include mass immunization, mobile clinic and targeted clinic types. Vaccine will also be administered through family doctors and pharmacies initially within provincial pilot programs and will increase as vaccine product type and supplies are sufficient. The City-operated immunization clinics are just one piece of the immunization plan for Toronto; there will be many and varied opportunities for vaccination for all residents who wish to have a vaccine, once the supply of vaccine increases and is stable.

Immunization plans for priority and vulnerable groups

In partnership with the Province and community agencies, the City is planning targeted vaccination campaigns for high-risk and vulnerable populations. This will include mobile clinics to serve shelter system clients and people experiencing homelessness as well as targeted mobile clinics in high transmission neighbourhoods.

The ITF's Community Liaison Function is using a targeted approach to ensure universal equity for vaccine access. The team is working with racialized communities to determine the best approach to meet each community's unique needs and interests. A Black Community COVID-19 Response Plan designed to provide enhanced support for Black Torontonians is being developed. The City has also reached out to South Asian communities and is currently working with community leaders to determine an appropriate engagement process. In addition, the City is actively engaging with Indigenous communities through its Indigenous Affairs Office.

The City of Toronto acknowledges that community mobilization and engagement efforts are critical to COVID-19 disparity reduction, including ensuring vaccine access in every corner of Toronto.

Community Engagement & Mobilization Update

The following provides a high level update of the Community Engagement & Mobilization Plan.

To facilitate information-sharing and issue management between TPH and various partners, the Community Cluster Program (CCP) was implemented at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this program, TPH continues to disseminate relevant and timely information to over 125 community agencies, as well as the 12 partner agencies funded through the COVID-19 Equity Action Plan.

The Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity is targeting efforts to promote knowledge and understanding that builds vaccine confidence.

- Town halls are targeted for specific populations and neighbourhoods including women, health professionals, faith groups and COVID-19 'hot spots' areas and are driving social media messaging on vaccine.
- Town hall events have been strengthening vaccine messages to the Black population and beyond.
- Mainstream, ethnic and social media presence have enabled a focus on addressing vaccine myths and misinformation.
- Four public town halls held for Black History Month, including a three-hour radio program
- Three additional town halls are planned for March, including two with Mayor Tory.

Indigenous, Black, People with Disabilities, Seniors, South Asian, People experiencing homelessness, Latin American/Hispanic/Latinx, and Persons who are Undocumented require a targeted approach due to the differential impact COVID-19 is having in these communities. Therefore, intensive outreach to community organizations serving these population groups has begun. This includes:

- City's Seniors Strategy Accountability Table
- Community Services Sector Umbrella Advisory to help pro-actively prioritize and respond to support rolling out the plan. Sector representation are as follows,
 - Black Health Alliance
 - Centre for Independent Living Toronto
 - Council of Agencies Serving South Asians
 - Ontario Community Support Association
 - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
 - Social Planning Toronto
 - Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
 - United Way Greater Toronto
- Meeting with senior-serving organizations to better understand their needs as the vaccine roll-out prioritizes residents who are 80+ years and older
- Meeting with over 160 representatives from the Community Cluster Program organizations on the vaccine engagement framework and the call for proposals.

On March 8, 2021, the City released a call for proposals for up to \$5.5 million to Toronto's community services sector to fund community agencies who will act as local anchor agencies for vaccination efforts across 140 neighbourhoods. Additional dedicated funding will also be provided for Indigenous leaders and communities to self-determine their approach to community engagement and vaccine mobilization in their communities. Funding includes recruitment and training of 280 community ambassadors for communities across the city.

Various initiatives are being implemented to ensure no corner of Toronto is left out in the vaccine roll out. This includes:

- Outreach and engagement with Latin American/Hispanic community to better understand their needs to inform the vaccine engagement
- Outreach and partnership with disability researchers and experts from the community sector to conduct town halls for People with Disabilities
- Partnering with the South Asian community to inform communications materials
- Working with various faith leaders to ensure accurate and culturally relevant messaging on vaccine
- Finalizing partnership with behavioural scientists to support training for 280 community ambassadors.

COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Working Group

Vaccines are safe and can protect recipients from serious illness due to COVID-19. Polling data done by the City in the fall showed that 73% of Toronto residents would be ready to get the vaccine. However, 11% were not sure, as some people continue to experience vaccine hesitancy. Vaccine hesitancy is complex, context-specific and variable across time and place. Vaccine hesitancy can be influenced by factors such as complacency, convenience and confidence in the vaccine.

Promoting the benefits of vaccination cannot rely only on facts. Trust is an important component. Misinformation - especially on social media - contributes to hesitancy. Personal decisions may be based on decades of experiences that produce health disparities. For many racialized groups, vaccine hesitancy can be based on a long history of mistrust of government and health care institutions.

To address vaccine hesitancy, TPH has convened a COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Working Group to develop a multi-sectoral approach to boost vaccine confidence in City of Toronto staff, health care professionals and communities with histories of low vaccination rates.

The objectives of the group are to:

- Create and promote a trusted network that is a source for vaccine information
- Support the public to make informed decisions about vaccination
- Provide clear information and guidance for health care providers
- Support and empower staff to answer vaccine questions with confidence
- Ensure that TPH staff adhere to the immunization position statement/philosophy
- Collaborate with community partners to ensure equity and access.

The work of the COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Working Group is ongoing in anticipation of increased vaccine supply. The first areas for focus include the long-term care health sector, health care providers, and staff training.

Collection of Disaggregated Vaccine Information

On January 18, 2021, the BOH requested that the Medical Officer of Health explore any opportunity to directly collect disaggregated data as part of TPH's COVID-19 immunization campaign. The Province of Ontario is in the process of establishing an electronic tracking system for COVID-19 vaccines called COVaxON.

The Province has confirmed that collection of some disaggregated data will be tracked through the provincial system, COVaxON.

This report recommends that the Ministry of Health collect additional and fulsome disaggregated data on those who obtain the COVID-19 vaccination as part of the provincial online COVID-19 vaccination tracking system (COVaxON) and provide access for Toronto Public Health to analyze this data. This data should include: household income, official language, household size, postal code, racial identity, and occupation.

Timing

On March 8, 2021, it was announced that three of the City of Toronto's mass immunization clinics will open on March 17 to vaccinate residents who are over the age of 80.

The three City-run clinics to open on March 17 are:

- Metro Toronto Convention Centre
- Scarborough Town Centre
- Toronto Congress Centre.

The timing for the opening of the remaining City-operated immunization clinics will be determined by provincial distribution of vaccine. Vaccine allotments for the City are determined by the provincial government. The province determines vaccine eligibility for different population groups in each phase of vaccination according to the Province's Ethical Framework for COVID-19 vaccine prioritization.

Next steps

The City will provide additional information about the clinics and their operations, including the process for scheduling immunization appointments through a provincially-run booking system, once vaccine supply becomes available. More information on the City's Vaccination Program is available online: www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-vaccines/.

Workplace Outbreaks

On February 11, 2021, following the Board of Health (BOH) direction on January 18, 2021, TPH began to report active COVID-19 outbreaks at local workplaces. Workplace outbreak data includes data from workplaces in active outbreak with more than 20 employees and is published on the COVID-19 Monitoring Dashboard. The information is updated weekly on Thursdays: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-latest-city-of-toronto-news/covid-19-status-of-cases-in-toronto/>

When TPH is informed of one or more COVID-19 cases in a workplace, TPH begins an investigation. This includes collecting information from individuals who have tested positive, identifying close contacts, including close contacts in the workplace, to ensure they are home and self-isolating. TPH provides recommendations to employers on ways to prevent further virus transmission in the workplace.

TPH declares workplace outbreaks using the Ontario Ministry of Health definition: two or more lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 with an epidemiological link in a workplace. This means that the individuals could work in the same area, or as part of the same work shift; and that they both became infected with the virus within the past 14 days. Circumstances for reasonably acquiring an infection in a workplace setting can also include no confirmed source of infection outside of the workplace or recent travel history.

TPH has limited public posting of the names of workplaces in active outbreak to workplaces that employ 20 or more people. This is to help protect the personal health information and the identity of people with COVID-19 in small workplaces. The weekly postings include the workplace name, the number of COVID-19 cases related to the setting, and the date the outbreak was declared. As outbreaks are declared over, workplaces will be removed from the list as part of the weekly updates.

Section 22 Class Order for workplaces in outbreak

March 3, 2021, the Medical Officer of Health issued a [Section 22 Class Order](#) for workplaces in active outbreak, in order to provide additional protections in workplaces and to help prevent the further spread of the COVID-19 virus and Variants of Concern.

The Class Order outlines additional public health requirements that apply to all workplaces in Toronto that have an active outbreak of COVID-19. The purpose of the Class Order is to mitigate COVID-19 spread while in active outbreak by enhancing public health measures and supporting case management. The Section 22 Class Order is made under the authority of the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

Under the Section 22 Class Order, all persons who own or operate a workplace will be required to comply with additional public health measures, including the following, during the period in which the workplace is in an active outbreak of COVID-19:

- Ensure the use of masks by every worker in the workplace at all times for the duration of the outbreak. The only exceptions are if a worker is eating or drinking or other limited exemptions.
- Follow Toronto Public Health instructions pertaining to COVID-19 testing for workers.

- For a workplace common area (i.e. washrooms, lunch rooms, change rooms):
 - ensure that 2 meters distance between workers can be maintained;
 - limit capacity to 25% of maximum occupancy; and
 - post signage indicating the maximum number of people permitted in each common area.
- Provide contact information for a designated contact person at the workplace to manage communications and implement any additional measures as required by Toronto Public Health.
- Maintain a record of every worker who attends the workplace during the outbreak.
- Comply with instructions from infection prevention and control personnel from Toronto Public Health, including allowing entry into the workplace for inspection and to support enhanced infection prevention and control measures.
- Post Toronto Public Health signage about physical distancing, hand washing and mask wearing.

Failure to comply with the Class Order may result in enforcement action, including a fine of \$5,000 for an individual or \$25,000 for a corporation for every day or part of each day for which non-compliance occurs or a ticket in the amount of \$750.

The Section 22 Class Order provides a new tool for Toronto Public Health to ensure rigorous public health measures are followed, in order to mitigate workplace outbreaks and support case management. This Class Order complements other public health measures put in place for workplaces, including regulations under the Reopening Ontario Act, the existing Letter of Instruction to all workplaces, and Toronto Public Health guidance documents for workplaces.

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SIGNATURE

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