

Response to COVID-19 - September 2021 Update

Date: September 13, 2021

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The City of Toronto (the City) is currently in the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this report, we are observing an average of 153 daily COVID-19 cases over a 7-day period. As of September 9, 2021, 77.9% of individuals over the age of 12 have been fully vaccinated in Toronto. While the ongoing uptake of vaccination by Toronto residents is positive, analysis and modelling of the fourth wave demonstrates that ongoing vigilance is required to both promote increased vaccination and monitor progress towards reducing COVID-19 transmission.

This report provides an update on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic as of September 2021, and responds to Board of Health direction from March 2021 for the Medical Officer of Health to report on COVID-19 workplace vaccination policies. This report also responds to direction from the Board of Health in June 2021 to provide an update on Toronto Public Health (TPH) efforts to support the safe return to school. Finally, this report makes a recommendation for the Medical Officer of Health to monitor ongoing vaccine policy developments at the provincial level and request the Province of Ontario (the Province) to require school-age children who are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine to be vaccinated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to monitor the implementation of the Province of Ontario's vaccine certificate program and report back to the Board of Health in the first quarter of 2022 with an update on the program's impact in Toronto.
2. The Board of Health request the Province of Ontario to require COVID-19 vaccination for students who are eligible based on their age/year of birth.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

DECISION HISTORY

On June 14, 2021, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on the Response to COVID-19 – June 2021 Update.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL29.1>

On May 10, 2021, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on the Response to COVID-19 - May 2021 Update.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL28.1>

On April 12, 2021, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a presentation to the Board of Health on the Response to COVID-19 - April 2021 Update.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL27.1>

On March 22, 2021, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on the Response to COVID-19 - March 2021 Update.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL26.1>

On January 18, 2021, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a report and presentation to the Board of Health on the Response to 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 the Response to 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 20, 2020, the Medical Officer of Health delivered a presentation to the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee on Toronto Public Health's Response and Efforts Related to COVID-19.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.DI11.2>

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: Update on 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 Preparation 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 Toronto Public Health's Response to COVID-19: Context, Status Update, and Next Steps.

<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 on COVID-19 Response and Recovery - Update.

<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 on COVID-19 Update.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL16.2>

COMMENTS

1. Status of COVID-19 Epidemic in Toronto

The COVID-19 pandemic continues into the fourth wave, with a 7-day moving average in COVID-19 cases of 153. To date, the fourth wave of COVID-19 is resulting in notably higher hospitalization rates among those who are not fully vaccinated, as compared to those who are vaccinated. This is concerning given a number of residents in Toronto remain unvaccinated and are disproportionately at risk of severe impacts of COVID-19 at this time.

Emerging epidemiology and evidence demonstrate that due to the presence of and high transmissibility of the Delta variant, individuals who are not vaccinated are putting their own health at risk, and are also increasing the health risks for others, particularly for children under the age of 12 who are not currently eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine has been shown to reduce virus transmission, and protect against severe consequences of COVID-19 infection including hospitalization and death.

On September 1, 2021, the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory and Modelling Consensus Tables (the Science Table) released projections forecasting a substantial fourth wave. Projections anticipate that the fourth wave will affect all age groups, with

the potential to exceed Intensive Care Unit (ICU) capacity in Ontario. Due to the highly transmissible Delta variant, the Science Table has identified the need to accelerate vaccination to ensure that greater than 85% of the eligible population (12 years of age and older) is fully vaccinated, while also keeping contact rates among residents at 70% of what they were in the pre-pandemic period. Reducing the rate of contact between residents relies on ongoing public health measures, such as reducing indoor density through occupancy limits, maintaining physical distancing, limiting large gatherings, continuing policies that require indoor masking, and having employees work from home where possible.

2. Team Toronto Vaccination Update

Toronto Public Health, the City, and health system partners continue to work towards increasing the number of residents in Toronto who are fully vaccinated. As of September 9, 83.9% of the City's eligible residents have received one dose and 77.9% are fully vaccinated.

Hyper-local Strategy

The City continues to operate five vaccination clinics in strategic locations. To build on these efforts, the City has also launched a hyper-local vaccination strategy, which focuses on making the vaccine as accessible as possible. This includes the operation of mobile vaccine clinics in locations guided by local epidemiology, vaccine rates, advice from community leaders, and factors such as age.

The hyper-local strategy is expected to increase the ability for TPH to bring mobile vaccination clinics to workplaces, faith groups, post-secondary institutions, childcare facilities, and other locations, such as Toronto Transit Commission stations, malls, grocery stores, and libraries. Toronto Public Health is also monitoring the latest research and evidence on ways to encourage those who are vaccine hesitant to get vaccinated and is employing a variety of strategies to accomplish this, including using community ambassadors and Vaccine Engagement Teams to promote vaccination in certain neighbourhoods, working with family doctors, bringing vaccine to community locations, and expanding public education efforts.

Vaccine Engagement Teams

Vaccine Engagement Teams (VETs) are a particular strategy to enhance vaccine equity measures to support equity-deserving groups disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA) has been coordinating the VET program, in partnership with TPH.

At this time, VETs operate through fourteen geographic and population-based consortiums made up of over 155 health, community, and faith-based organizations. Consortiums utilize a variety of agile, place-based approaches to increase vaccine confidence and access, and prioritize equity-based engagement and mobilization. Activities include vaccine education and awareness building campaigns, targeted outreach strategies, and mobilization of over 200 multilingual community ambassadors. Ambassadors act as key points of contact in the neighbourhoods where they live and/or work to build vaccine confidence, provide access to vaccine resources, and amplify public health messaging across their networks.

Social Development, Finance and Administration, in partnership with TPH, is currently leading a preliminary evaluation of VETs to assess the extent to which they have enhanced vaccine confidence and access among equity-deserving groups in Toronto. Additionally, SDFA will evaluate the consortium-led delivery model and the skill development of community ambassadors. Findings from the evaluation will identify lessons learned, enable continuous service improvements, and recommend solutions to address systemic issues and barriers. The intelligence gathered will provide a baseline for the initiative's final evaluation planned for completion in March 2022.

3. Vaccination Policy

In March 2021, the Board of Health requested that the Medical Officer of Health explore practices in other jurisdictions and the legislative authority to mandate COVID-19 vaccination. Since this time, there have been a number of developments with respect to vaccine policy, including requirements for workplaces to implement vaccine policies, announcements on populations who are eligible for a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and the implementation of a vaccine certificate program in Ontario.

Vaccine Policies in the Workplace

Employers are legally required to take measures to promote occupational health and safety in the workplace, which includes protecting employees from the transmission of disease. In recognition of this, employers, including governments (for example, the federal and provincial governments), businesses, and other public sector organizations, such as the University of Toronto and the University Health Network, have taken steps to implement workplace vaccination policies.

On July 1, 2021, the Province issued a directive requiring long-term care homes to have COVID-19 immunization policies for staff. Under this directive, each staff member must provide proof of vaccination. The Province took further action on August 17, 2021 and issued a directive mandating hospitals, home and community care service providers, congregate settings, and ambulance services to have vaccination policies for their

organizations. Employees in these settings will be required to, at minimum, provide proof of full vaccination against COVID-19, a medical exemption for not being vaccinated against COVID-19, or complete a COVID-19 vaccination educational session; employees that remain unvaccinated will be required to undergo regular testing.

The Province has also directed public and private schools, as well as licensed childcare settings, to implement vaccination policies by September 27, 2021. These policies must require employees, volunteers, and other personnel whose work involves in-person interactions to provide proof of full vaccination or undergo regular testing for COVID-19. The City has taken important steps to promote vaccination amongst its employees. In September 2021, the City will begin implementing a policy which requires that all employees receive two doses of vaccine by October 30, 2021 and provide proof of vaccination. Staff who have not been vaccinated, or who have not disclosed their vaccination status will be required to attend mandatory education on the benefits of vaccination and then to provide proof of the first dose by September 30, 2021. The City is committed to complying with its Ontario Human Rights Code obligations and will consider any employee requests for accommodation in accordance with the City's established human rights policies and procedures.

See Attachment 1 for a Jurisdictional Overview of Vaccination Policy.

Third Dose of COVID-19 Vaccine

The Province announced on August 17, 2021 that it will begin offering third doses of COVID-19 vaccine to populations at highest risk of the Delta variant. This includes individuals who are transplant recipients, patients with hematological cancers, recipients of anti-CD20 agents, and residents of high-risk congregate settings, such as long-term care homes, retirement homes, and First Nations elder lodges. Toronto Public Health is working with provincial colleagues and health system partners on the rollout of these third doses to those who are currently eligible and will expand this work to include any other new populations that become eligible through provincial policy guidelines.

Vaccine Certification

On September 2, 2021, the Province introduced a vaccine certificate program. As of September 22, 2021, Ontarians will need to provide proof of full vaccination in order to access certain public settings and facilities. The program focuses on high-risk indoor public settings, bars, nightclubs and restaurants, as well as gyms, meeting and event spaces, and indoor sporting events. Requirements will not apply to settings where people receive medical care, food from grocery stores, or medical supplies.

Initially, individuals will be required to show their Ministry of Health vaccine confirmation receipt that includes proof of two doses, along with a piece of photo identification. The Province will be developing an application for release in October 2021 that will allow individuals to easily access their proof of vaccination through a cellphone device. Individuals who cannot receive the vaccine due to medical exemptions will be permitted entry with a physician's note until recognized medical exemptions can be integrated as

a part of a digital vaccine certificate. Children under the age of 12, who are not yet eligible to receive the vaccine, are also exempted from the program.

Vaccine passport programs have also been introduced in Quebec, British Columbia, and Manitoba. Jurisdictions, such as British Columbia, reported that vaccine bookings in the Province more than doubled after British Columbia announced its vaccine passport program. The Province of Ontario reported observing significant increases in vaccine bookings across the Province shortly after it announced the vaccine certificate program.

Toronto Public Health views the implementation of a vaccination certificate in Ontario as a positive development that will help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Staff will continue to monitor the implementation of the provincial vaccine certificate program, including how it influences Toronto residents to get vaccinated.

Vaccination of School-Age Children

In Ontario, the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* (the *Act*) requires that all children under the age of 18 registered in school demonstrate proof of immunization against diseases designated in the *Act*. Currently, there are nine infectious diseases covered under the *Act* (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, poliomyelitis, measles, mumps, rubella, meningococcal disease, and varicella). COVID-19 is not currently listed as a designated disease under the *Act*.

The safety and effectiveness of the approved COVID-19 vaccines has been proven in children aged 12 and older. Given the current epidemiology of COVID-19 and the need to support the safe re-opening of schools, it recommended that the Province require COVID-19 vaccination for students who are eligible based on their age/year of birth.

4. Supporting Safe Re-Opening of Schools

Toronto Public Health provides COVID-19 guidance and support to four publicly funded school boards of over 800 elementary and secondary schools, 380 privately funded/independent schools, and nine post-secondary institutions. At this time, a major focus of Toronto Public Health support to schools includes promotion of vaccination, and the operation of pop-up and mobile vaccine clinics in school and community locations.

Elementary/Secondary Schools

Toronto Public Health established a fully integrated team to provide a coherent and seamless response to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases that were being reported in elementary and secondary schools throughout the 2020/21 school year. Support to schools included investigation of COVID-19 cases, COVID-19 outbreak management, education on the COVID-19 vaccine, and information for students, teachers, and parents to access COVID-19 testing.

Toronto Public Health will continue to work with schools throughout the 2021/22 school year, guided by the Ministry of Education's [COVID-19 Health, Safety and Operation Guidance for Schools \(2021-2022\)](#) released on August 3, 2021. The Provincial plan includes guidance on public health measures, such as:

- COVID-19 screening for students, staff and visitors;
- Masking protocols;
- Cohorting of students;
- Physical distancing measures;
- Cleaning and disinfecting practices; and,
- Promotion of COVID-19 vaccine for eligible students, staff, visitors and families, as schools re-open for in person learning in September 2021.

Toronto Public Health will continue to monitor COVID-19 cases and coordinate with education partners to implement enhanced health and safety measures to address outbreaks and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools as the school year progresses.

Post-Secondary

Toronto Public Health has also provided dedicated liaison and COVID-19 guidance to nine post-secondary institutions in the City. In particular, TPH has supported these institutions with developing policies to increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake and promotion of vaccine benefits.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Dr. Eileen de Villa
Medical Officer of Health

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Jurisdictional Overview of Vaccine Policy

ATTACHMENT 1: JURISDICTIONAL OVERVIEW OF VACCINE POLICY

JURISDICTION OR ORGANIZATION	TYPE	SUMMARY
Air Canada	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires employees to complete vaccination series in order to work.
Bank of Montreal	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires employees to complete vaccination series in order to return to in-person work.
California	Workplace policy (State-level)	State employees are required to submit documentation of COVID-19 immunization or be tested regularly. Includes health care workers and those in congregate facilities.
Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires employees to complete vaccination series in order to return to in-person work.
City of Toronto	Workplace policy (Employer)	All members of the Toronto Public Service are required to disclose vaccination status and provide proof of vaccination.
Department of Veterans Affairs (United States)	Workplace policy (Federal agency)	Requires health care workers to get COVID-19 vaccines, including physicians, dentists, registered nurses, physician assistants, and anyone who works in departmental facilities or provides direct care to veterans.
European Union	Vaccine certificate (Multinational union)	Implemented EU Digital COVID Certificate in summer 2021; member states can decide if they accept certificates after one or two doses.
George Brown College	Vaccination policy (Post-secondary)	Anyone attending for in-person school or work need to be fully vaccinated.
Government of Ontario	Vaccination policy (various)	COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for high-risk settings, including long-term care homes, post-secondary institutions, retirement homes, women's shelters, and select congregate group homes and day programs.
Humber College	Vaccination policy (Post-secondary)	Anyone attending for in-person school or work need to be fully vaccinated.
Israel	Vaccine certificate (country-wide)	Implemented Green Pass COVID-19 vaccine certificate on February 21, 2021 for those who are fully vaccinated.
Live Nation	Vaccination policy (sports and entertainment)	Requires proof of vaccination or recent negative COVID-19 test for attendees 12 and up.

JURISDICTION OR ORGANIZATION	TYPE	SUMMARY
Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment	Vaccination policy (sports and entertainment)	Requires proof of vaccination or recent negative COVID-19 test for attendees and staff.
Mayo Clinic (Minnesota, USA)	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires all employees to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 or complete a declination process. Staff who decline to be vaccinated for COVID-19 must complete education modules and will be required to wear masks and socially distance when on campus.
Mirvish	Vaccination policy (sports and entertainment)	Requires proof of vaccination or recent negative COVID-19 test for attendees and staff.
New York City	Workplace policy (City-wide)	COVID-19 mandate expanded to require entire municipal workforce to get vaccinated or begin weekly testing by September 13. Includes employees in the school system, as well as fire and police departments.
New York State	Vaccine certificate State-level	Implemented Excelsior Pass on March 26, 2021 for fully vaccinated individuals.
OCAD University	Vaccination policy (Post-secondary)	Anyone attending for in-person school or work need to be fully vaccinated or be subject to rapid screening program.
Rogers Communications	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires employees to complete vaccination series in order to return to in-person work.
Royal Bank of Canada	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires employees to complete vaccination series in order to return to in-person work.
Ryerson University	Vaccination policy (Post-secondary)	Anyone attending for in-person school or work need to be fully vaccinated or be subject to rapid screening program.
Seneca College (Toronto, ON)	Vaccination policy (Post-secondary)	Restricts access to campus to those who are fully immunized (or have specific exemptions). Applies to both domestic and international students, as well as employees and contractors.
Sun Life Financial	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires employees to complete vaccination series in order to return to in-person work.
Toronto Blue Jays	Vaccination policy (sports and entertainment)	Requires proof of vaccination or recent negative COVID-19 test for attendees 12 and up.

JURISDICTION OR ORGANIZATION	TYPE	SUMMARY
Toronto Dominion Bank	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires employees to complete vaccination series in order to return to in-person work.
Toronto Zoo	Vaccination policy (sports and entertainment)	Requires employees and volunteers to complete vaccination series.
University Health Network (Toronto, ON)	Workplace policy (Employer)	Requires all staff to report one of four options: if they have been vaccinated; if they are exempt from vaccination for medical reasons; if they wish not to disclose their vaccination status; or if they will not be receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.
University of Toronto	Vaccination policy (Post-secondary)	Anyone attending for in-person school or work need to be fully vaccinated or be subject to rapid screening program.
York University	Vaccination policy (Post-secondary)	Anyone attending for in-person school or work need to be fully vaccinated.