

March 12, 2022

Toronto Board of Health

Re: Bringing a Public Health Lens to Indoor Ventilation Requirements

Colleagues,

One of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a widened appreciation for the importance of adequate indoor ventilation as a tool to reduce the spread of respiratory infectious diseases. There is value in taking a closer look at how we construct and operate buildings, and the possibility that improved standards and practices can have broad public health benefits.

Many dimensions of indoor ventilation are outside of the direct jurisdiction of local public health or municipalities. In addition, Toronto Public Health is not currently positioned with extensive in-house technical expertise on the matter. Support on this issue, and specifically updated guidance to municipalities and local public health, is needed from authorities such as Public Health Ontario and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The City of Toronto is currently undertaking a review of the Property Standards By-law, and the Municipal Licencing and Standards division anticipates reporting to City Council later this spring to kick off Phase Two of the work. This is a near-term opportunity to put evolving knowledge into practice, and we are recommending that ventilation requirements be added to the work plan for review.

Recommendation:

1. City Council request the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards and the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building, to review the latest knowledge and best practices for air ventilation to reduce the transmission of agents of infectious disease through the air and consider updates to the Property Standards Bylaw in future phases of the Property Standards Bylaw Review, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health.
2. City Council request the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat, to consider opportunities to leverage improvements to ventilation and air quality to reduce airborne transmission of disease as part of future implementation of the Tower Renewal Program.
3. The Board of Health request the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario to continue to review evidence on the transmission of agents of infectious disease, including SARS-CoV-2, through the air and to provide guidance and support to municipalities to implement ventilation upgrades and other measures proven to reduce airborne transmission of disease.
4. The Board of Health request that the Medical Officer of Health, in consultation with the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards and the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building, provide an update to the Board of Health on any proposed changes to ventilation standards in the Property Standards Bylaw in 2023, including updates on any new guidance and support from the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario on measures to reduce airborne transmission of disease.

Sincerely,
Dr. Kate Mulligan
Director

Joe Cressy
Chair