

Addressing Pandemic Health Impacts on Children and Youth

Presentation to the Board of Health

September 11, 2023

Provides an update to the Board of Health on:

- Health status of school-aged children and youth
- Actions to address the COVID-19 pandemic impacts on the health of school-aged children and youth
- Recommendations to further enhance the work done by Toronto Public Health

Areas of concern for school-aged children and youth



Mental health and well-being



Physical inactivity and increased screen time



Overdue student immunizations



Dental screening

Spotlight on TPH 140: Early 20th Century Public Health Interventions

Early 1900s: Toronto's health and education officials began to concern themselves with the health of children of low-income families living in the city's crowded slums

1917: The Department of Public Health assumed the responsibility of medical and dental examinations of students

1910: The Board of Education began providing medical and dental examinations and oral health education in schools

1913 until 1963: the Department of Health and the Board of Education worked together to accommodate children's special health needs in schools with programming tailored to the needs of children who were:

- exposed to tuberculosis
- had poor nutrition
- facing emotional, physical, or social challenges.

Spotlight on TPH 140: 1990s to Present

1990: Ontario's Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA)

1994: School-based Hepatitis B vaccine

2005: School-based Meningococcal Vaccine Program

2016: Toronto Healthy School Strategy 2016 to 2020

2016: School-based human papillomavirus vaccine program includes males and female

2020 -2023: COVID-19 Child and Youth Response Team

64,700 case investigation, 36,400 contact investigations, 3,280 outbreak investigations

Early 2000s: Adoption of Comprehensive School Health Model and Introduction of School Liaison Public Health Nurses

2007: School-based Human Papillomavirus vaccine program for females

2018: New School Health Standard released in the Ontario Public Health Standards

2022-2026 Renewed Toronto Healthy School Strategy

Current Status: Mental Health Promotion and Well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in indirect mental health impacts on children and youth:

- One-quarter (26%) of Ontario students felt online learning from home was very or extremely difficult
- Over half (59%) of Ontario students reported that the pandemic has left them feeling depressed about the future
- Over one-third (39%) reported that it made their mental health worse
- Toronto emergency department visits related to self-harm among children and youth increased by 30% in the first year following the start of the pandemic

Evidence suggests that household food insecurity is linked with negative mental health outcomes for children and youth

- One in five households in Toronto reported food insecurity in the past year

Substance misuse among school aged children and youth has remained relatively stable

The 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey indicates that most Ontario students do not report drinking alcohol or using drugs. Of those who do, the most-used substances among grade 7-12 students are:

- High-caffeine energy drinks (33.1%)
- Alcohol (31.8%)
 - 8% of students reported binge drinking at least once in the past month (a decrease from 9.8% in 2019)
- Cannabis (17%)
 - 14% secondary school students report that they used cannabis to cope with a mental health concern at least once in the past year, which is similar to the 2019 rate
- Vaping (15%)
 - Of those that report vaping in the last year, the majority (84 percent) report vaping nicotine, an increase from 56% in 2019

Current Status: Physical Activity

Current evidence suggests physical inactivity and increased screen time as an area of concern for school-age children and youth

- 37% of Canadian youth aged 12-17 years are meeting the recommended 60 minutes of moderate-vigorous physical activity daily, down from 51% before the pandemic
- Declines in physical activity were significant in:
 - Indigenous youth (67% pre-pandemic, 38% during pandemic)
 - Immigrant youth (56% pre-pandemic, 35% during pandemic)



- Over 88% of Canadian students spend three hours per day in front of a screen (“recreational screen time”)
- 31% spend over 5 hours on social media per day, an increase from 21% in 2019
- Increase in screen time often corresponds to an increase in cyber bullying (22% in 2019 compared to 30% in 2021)
- 24% of Canadian students reported playing video games for over 5 hours per day, an increase from 11% in 2019
 - 20% of students meet the criteria for a video gaming problem

Goal: Toronto Public Health plans to continue its efforts to get us back to pre-pandemic rates and beyond

- Since June 2022, Toronto Public Health has focused on helping grade 7-12 students catch up on school-based vaccinations
- At the end of the 2022-23 school year, Toronto Public Health catch-up efforts are reflected in increased vaccination rates

114,523 vaccines provided
in schools

54,967
students

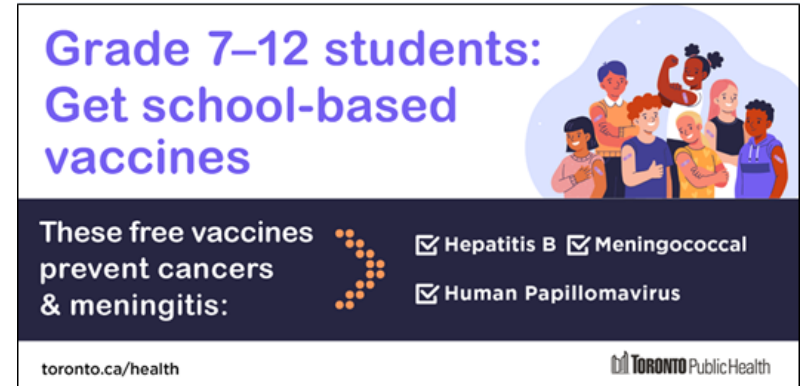
1,100
clinics

560
unique
schools

Current Status: Student Immunization Program

- Despite catch-up efforts, vaccination rates have been lower post-pandemic
- **Action:**
 - **Grade 7 & 8** will be offered these vaccines in school again this year
 - **Grades 9 to 12** who missed these vaccines can still get them for free at a [TPH immunization clinic](#)


Student Immunization Program (grade 7) vaccines		
	2017/2018	2022/2023
Meningococcal	86%	78%
Hepatitis B	77%	62.5%
Human Papillomavirus	66%	57%



**Grade 7–12 students:
Get school-based
vaccines**

These free vaccines prevent cancers & meningitis:

- Hepatitis B
- Meningococcal
- Human Papillomavirus

toronto.ca/health 

Current Status: Routine Vaccinations under Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA)

- [Routine vaccines](#): Required or a valid exemption under the Immunization of School Pupils Act:
 - Measles
 - Mumps
 - Rubella
 - Diphtheria
 - Meningococcal
 - Tetanus
 - Polio
 - Pertussis
 - Chicken pox
- Toronto Public Health will continue to send letters to parents and students who are outstanding

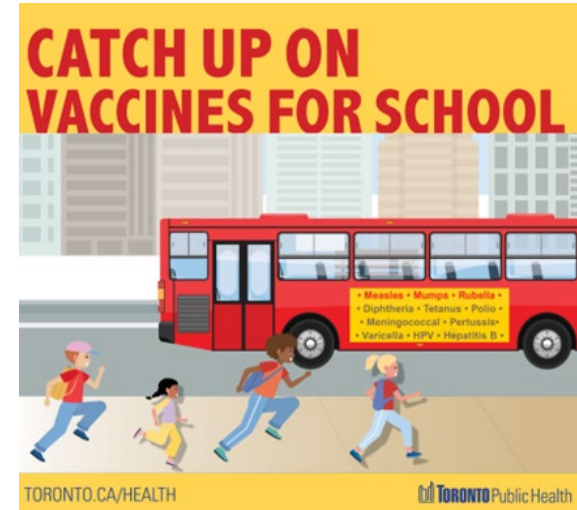


Parents: report vaccinations to Toronto Public Health at [Immunization Connect](#)

Current Status: Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) Assessments

- Vaccine compliance rates before pandemic versus current show a decrease in reported and/or received routine vaccines
- These trends are consistent with provincial rates
- Continue a dynamic and collaborative approach in catch up efforts for the 2023-2024 school year

Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) vaccines		
	2017/2018	2022/2023
Grade 2	78%	43%
Grade 11	91%	23%
Grade 12	87%	22%



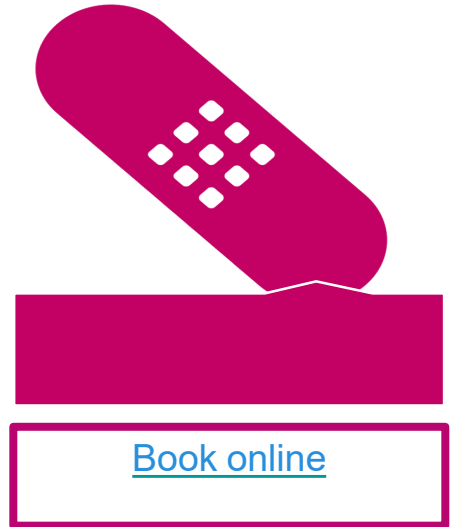
Current Status: Where to get Routine Vaccinations

Routine vaccines are available at primary care offices and [City Immunization Clinics – City of Toronto](#)

- Hours of operation at all City immunization clinics are:
 - Tuesday to Friday: Noon to 6 p.m.
 - Saturday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
 - Sunday & Monday: Closed

Clinic locations:

- Cloverdale Mall (250 The East Mall)
- Metro Hall (214 Wellington St West)
- North York Civic Centre (5100 Yonge St)
- Scarborough (410 Progress Avenue, unit D3 – near Scarborough Town Centre)



- In the 2022-2023 school year, Toronto Public Health gradually resumed school dental and oral health screening services
- Children in junior kindergarten, senior kindergarten, and grade 2 were screened at all public schools
- Children in grades 4 and 7 were also screened in schools with previously recorded high rates of dental caries (tooth decay)
 - 73,451 children were screened
 - 4,323 children were identified with urgent needs for dental care
 - 22,366 were identified with dental concerns

All publicly-funded schools in Toronto have access to the following universal services:

- Online curriculum supports and resources
- Foundations for a Healthy School tools and resources
- Public Health Nurse assessments, consultations, and school staff capacity building
- School health services, such as oral health, immunizations, and infection prevention and control

School Liaison Public Health Nurses will work more intensively with schools with increased needs to promote optimal school health outcomes for all.

- The following health topics that have been prioritized in consultation with school boards and schools:
 - Student mental health promotion and well-being
 - Infection Prevention and Control
 - Nutrition & physical activity promotion
 - Sexual health promotion
 - Substance misuse prevention
- Vaccine Preventable Disease program will continue catch-up efforts
- Dental and Oral Health Services program will screen students in all elementary schools and invite secondary school students to screening clinics

Fall Respiratory Viruses

- Respiratory viruses are expected to increase
 - RSV, influenza, COVID-19 & other viruses
- RSV and influenza can be more serious in children
- In Australia and New Zealand: influenza strains that circulated were a good match to the vaccine.
- Flu & COVID boosters will be available in the fall
 - Get your children and yourself vaccinated to keep from getting very sick

Reduce the Spread of Respiratory Viruses

- Stay home when sick to prevent the spread of infections.
- [Screen](#) if symptoms of illness - [Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [Clean your hands](#)
- [Cover your cough](#)
- Disinfect surfaces
- Promote good ventilation
- [Stay up to date](#) with vaccines
- Masks may be important, especially for those who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

STOP Stay Home if You Have Symptoms
 Screen yourself/your child for COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses using this questionnaire. If you answer YES to any of the questions, stay home and follow guidance provided. September 1, 2023

1. Do you have any of these new or worsening symptoms? Yes No

A) One or more:		B) Two or more:		
Fever $\geq 38^\circ\text{C}$ and/or chills	Cough	Sore throat	Headache	Feeling very tired
Trouble breathing	Decrease or loss of taste/smell	Runny nose/nasal congestion	Muscle aches/joint pain	Nausea/vomiting/diarrhea

2. Have you tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 10 days and have symptom(s)? Yes No

If "YES" to Q.1 or 2 Stay home (self-isolate) Follow extra measures

3. Do you have only one symptom from 1(B) OR any of the following new or worsening symptoms? Yes No

- Abdominal pain • Pink eye • Decreased or no appetite

If "YES" Stay home until your symptom(s) is improving for 24 hours (48 hours for nausea/vomiting/diarrhea) and you do not have any new symptoms

Stay home (self-isolate) if you are sick:
 Stay home until you have no fever and your symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if nausea/vomiting/diarrhea).

Anyone who is feeling sick or has any new or worsening symptoms of illness, including those not listed, stay home until symptoms are improving and seek assessment if needed.

Follow extra measures: For 10 days after the start of symptoms:

Wear a well-fitted mask in all public settings (including schools/child care, unless ≥ 2 years of age).	Avoid non-essential activities where you take off your mask (e.g., playing an instrument in music class or during sports or dining out).	Do not visit people or settings (e.g. hospitals, long-term care homes) at higher risk, including where there are seniors or those who are immunocompromised.
--	--	--

This tool is consistent with [provincial self-assessment tool](#).

*If the symptom is from a known health condition that gives you the symptom, select "No." If the symptom is new, different or getting worse, select "Yes." If there is mild tiredness, sore muscles or joints within 48 hours after a COVID-19 or flu vaccine, select "Yes."

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to continue to work with Toronto school boards to monitor data on the ongoing health impacts of the pandemic and collaborate on joint initiatives to improve the health of school-aged children and youth.
2. The Board of Health request the Province of Ontario to work with education system partners to address wait times and increase priority access to care for students requiring intensive mental health interventions and supports within the community that exceed those available through school systems.

Thank you

Toronto Public Health
City of Toronto

277 Victoria Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 2L6
toronto.ca/health

Nicole Welch
Director, Child Health and Development

Dr. Vinita Dubey
Associate Medical Officer of Health, Vaccine
Preventable Diseases