

# Managing COVID in 2024-25

HL17.2: Toronto Public Health Preparations for the 2024-2025  
Respiratory Virus Season

# My perspective

- Well informed lay person
- Extensive background in community work and a long standing interest in public health
- My PhD is in Strategic Management, not health.
- Grandmother whose grandson, a TDSB student, nearly died of toxic shock from pneumonia last spring

# Schools are in crisis

- Extremely high absenteeism due to illness
- Extremely high teacher absences due to illness
- Great difficulty attracting and retaining teachers

# The scientific consensus has shifted

- Children are as vulnerable to COVID as adults.
- Children are as vulnerable to long COVID as adults. (Scientific American [article](#) this week)
- Transmission of COVID is overwhelmingly through the air
- Evidence emerging that cognitive effects of COVID infections are impairing children's learning

# Schools need honest, science based guidance on COVID prevention

## TPH advice re infectious diseases 2024

- To help protect our school communities, staff, students, and visitors are reminded to:
- Stay home if they are sick or have symptoms of illness.
- [Wash or sanitize their hands](#) often.
- [Cover their cough or sneeze with their elbow or a tissue.](#)
- Stay up to date on vaccinations:
  - Your child needs to be up to date with vaccinations, as outlined in Ontario's [Immunization of School Pupils Act \(ISPA\)](#), or have a valid exemption.
    - This includes vaccinations for measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, [pertussis](#) (whooping cough), meningococcal and varicella (chicken pox).
    - Toronto is seeing an increase in pertussis (whooping cough), similar to what is being reported across Ontario and Canada. Infection from this vaccine preventable disease starts like a common cold, with mild fever, runny nose, red watery eyes and a mild cough. It can then turn into coughing fits that last weeks or even months.
    - Vaccines are available through your primary care provider or at a [TPH vaccination clinic](#). Appointments can be made at [tphbookings.ca](#).
    - Vaccinations need to be reported to TPH using [Immunization Connect Ontario \(ICON\)](#).
- Updated COVID-19 and influenza (flu) vaccines will be available this fall.
  - Both vaccines will be important to prevent serious illness from these viruses during peak [respiratory illness season](#).

<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/home/ct/Details/מיד/43823/41>

## Reality check

- Emphasis on the responsibility of individuals, not a collective responsibility for safer spaces
- Sick children attend because parents need child care, asymptomatic children are infectious
- Not effective against airborne transmission. Is it possible for students to leave class and wash hands frequently? Is the warm water, soap and towels in schools?
- Helpful advice, but not very effective
- All so important. Good!
  - Why isn't COVID mentioned?
- COVID vaccines aren't available from TPH.
  - COVID is not seasonal. We were hoping, but it never happened.

# The TDSB does not cite 2 other PHAC guidelines for personal protective measures

- Wear a well-fitting respirator or mask
- Improve indoor ventilation
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/respiratory-infectious-diseases-reduce-spread-personal-protective-measures.html>


## Nor PHAC's advice on congregate settings

- Natural ventilation
- Mechanical ventilation
- CO2 meters
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/covid-19-improving-indoor-ventilation.html#a2c>

# TDSB has a [page](#) on ventilation

- Lots of headings
  - Filtering the Air
  - Ensuring Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Settings are Maximizing Ventilation
  - Maximizing Outdoor Air
  - Addressing Local Projects to Improve Ventilation
  - HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) Filters
- The only target mentioned is “Ensuring that where possible, indoor spaces receive three to six equivalent air changes per hour (ACHeq).”
- ASHRAE 241 requires the following rate in classrooms: 20 liters per second/person (6–10 ACH)

They have information on line by school, which says nothing about the actual air quality achieved (CO2 level or ACHeq)



**TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
SCHOOL BOARD VENTILATION PROFILE**

Select your school here

<b>School Name</b>	Earl Haig PS
<b>Ventilation System</b>	Partial Mechanical Ventilation
<b>School Ventilation and Filtration Measures*</b>	
Ventilation assessed	✓
Higher grade filters installed	
Increased frequency of filter changes	✓
Increased fresh air intake (windows and/or mechanical ventilation systems)	✓
Standalone HEPA** filter units deployed in portables, as needed	✓
Standalone HEPA filter units in place	36

\*Some measures may not be feasible within the context of a school facility/site and related building systems.  
\*\*High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA)

# The landscape in Ontario is shifting

- <https://www.tvo.org/article/breathing-room-why-parents-and-experts-are-calling-for-a-clean-air-revolution-in-schools>
- Dr Kwame McKenzie CEO, Wellesley Institute and director of health equity at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)  
<https://www.tvo.org/video/has-everyone-forgotten-about-covid>
- <https://www.ontarioschoolsafety.com/>

# What TPH can do in 2024-5

- Articulate and promote the scientific consensus on airborne transmission
- Assist TDSB to provide real time public data re AQ in classrooms
- Adopt and promote ASHRAE standards for AQ in schools and other institutions
- Work for all party adoption of Bill 140, Improving Air Quality for Our Children Act, 2023.