

Councillor Chris Moise, Chair

Board of Health members

Toronto, ON

October 21, 2024

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

I recognize that federal and provincial health policies and funding cuts impinge on TPH's COVID response.

I want to begin my remarks by quoting six leading experts who have published '[Canada Needs a National COVID-19 Public Inquiry Now](#)'. They include Doctors Zoutman and Vipond among others.

We are now in the fifth year of an ongoing pandemic, and Canada continues to experience significant surges of COVID-19 infections. In addition to the acute impacts of infection, accumulation of organ damage and disability is building a "health debt" that will affect Canadians for decades to come.

At our municipal level there are 3 major problems I want to address.

First, there is a knowledge gap among the public regarding the impact of COVID on health.

This minimizes the incentive to be vaccinated, mask or take other preventive precautions such as air quality measures.

Let me elaborate. Infectious disease specialists, internists, biologists and immunologists are pouring their knowledge out on social media platforms and in interviews when they are asked.

Only this week I gleaned this info thanks to them.

- 10-19 years olds who are diagnosed with Covid have an increased risk of developing diabetes. Source: SARS-CoV-2 Infection and New-Onset Type 2 Diabetes Among Pediatric Patients, 2020 to 2022 | Infectious Diseases | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network

- Covid-19 could be a powerful risk factor for heart attacks and strokes for as long as three years after an infection. Source: The medical journal [Atherosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology](#).
- Mild COVID infections are associated with a drop in IQ. Source: the [New England Journal of Medicine](#).
- Long COVID is associated with severe cognitive slowing. Source: [The Lancet](#).
- One in six Canadians infected with COVID report symptoms of Long Covid. Source: the [Canadian government](#).

Second, with respect to population health we need public health to ensure access to vaccination clinics because let's be frank Shopper's Drug Mart is an inadequate solution.

- Ontario's health care is at a breaking point. 2.5 million people are without a family doctor. Source: Ontario Medical Association.
- Dr. Iris Gorfinkle reports that high risk patients are still being turned away from receiving a COVID vaccine from primary care clinics.
- My own primary health team, part of one of Toronto's largest teaching hospitals will not be COVID vaccinating. Instead, they refer me to the provincial vaccine portal which in the past linked me to you OR to a pharmacy.

What are other health units doing? Some are finding solutions to vaccinate high-risk populations. See Appendix A.

Ottawa

- Ottawa Public Health clinic appointments booked through the Provincial Online Vaccine Booking System are intended for the following individuals:
 - high-risk individuals facing barriers to access...
 - other eligible [high-risk individuals](#) may be able to access the vaccine, as capacity allows.

Windsor

- The WECHU is focused on providing COVID-19 vaccine to high-risk and priority populations who have limited vaccine access options. Once available, appointments for a Windsor-Essex County Health Unit COVID-19 clinic can be booked online for individuals from high-risk and priority populations.

Sudbury: Same.

Hamilton: Same.

Kitchener offers two regional vaccination clinics through the Ontario portal

Third, is the need to improve messaging. To quote from the call for a national inquiry again:

“... confidence in public health requires accountability and clear, credible communication. While there are notable exceptions, most public health officials are still not accurately advising Canadians about the basic facts of COVID-19 transmission and how to mitigate it. The messaging should be consistent and clear: COVID-19 is airborne, transmitted primarily via infectious aerosols that move through the air like smoke and remain suspended in the air for long durations in poorly ventilated spaces. Advice to stay home when ill is sound, but Canadians are not being reminded of the substantial risks of asymptomatic COVID-19 transmission. To restore trust and better advise the public, communications must be vastly improved and transparently linked to comprehensive and trustworthy interdisciplinary information that is accessible to all.” (2024, Fisman et al)

While the provincial Medical Officer of Health is missing in action, that doesn't mean our health unit can't act more energetically.

The bottom line is the health care system and general population are going to be severely impeded by illness and especially long-term illness.

Recommendations

1. Request regular briefings on COVID morbidity and mortality to inform your decisions.
2. Launch vaccination clinics across the city for high-risk populations.
3. Create a vigorous public education campaign on the ongoing and cumulative risks of COVID infection and the layered prevention measures that remain valuable.

Sincerely,

Cathy Crowe, RN (non-practising), C.M.

Appendix A

Who is considered high risk?

Updated COVID-19 vaccine is now available in Ontario and is being prioritized for the following [high-risk and priority populations](#):

- adults 65 years of age or older
- individuals 6 months of age and older who are/have:
- residents of long-term care homes and other congregate living settings
- pregnant
- in or from First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities
- members of racialized and other equity-deserving communities
- [underlying medical conditions](#) that places them at higher risk of severe COVID-19, including children with complex health needs.
- children 6 months to 4 years of age
- staff and care providers of long-term care homes and other congregate living settings
- health care workers
- first responders
- individuals with significant exposure to birds and mammals (such as poultry, livestock, slaughterhouse and processing plant workers, wildlife officers/researchers, and veterinarians)