November 24, 2025

To the Board of Health;

I am a member of Clean Indoor Air Toronto (CIATO), a group of concerned Toronto residents who are dedicated to improving indoor air quality in our built environments. I am also a parent of children attending a Toronto District School Board (TDSB) school and a member of the school's Caring & Safe committee.

In Toronto Public Health's report "Mortality Trends and Leading Causes of Death among Toronto Residents 2014-2023", and the Medical Officer of Health's report, "Updated Mortality Trends for Residents of Toronto" (November 19, 2025), regarding TPH's COVID-19 pandemic response, although COVID-19 is not killing as many people as before vaccines became widely available, the report does not acknowledge the fact that COVID is a serious infection that carries a significant risk of long-term and chronic health issues that reduce quality of life and increase the risk of mortality, nor does it mention the likelihood that this growing burden of poor health due to prior COVID-19 infection is almost certainly contributing to excess mortality.[1,2] COVID-19 infection is associated with: Long COVID, increased risk of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease (including heart failure and stroke), diabetes, immune dysregulation, early onset of neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia, and other serious, potentially disabling conditions.[3-8] These risks appear to grow with the number of infections, and affect people of all ages.[7,8]

In addition, the TPH report does not mention mortality related to climate change. Environmental carcinogens such as wildfire smoke and fine particulates (PM2.5) generated by climate-related events (e.g., desertification, heavy rains) are associated with increased rates of cancer, particular lung cancer.[9-11] The TPH report on mortality trends cites cancers of the lungs and bronchus as the third leading cause of mortality in 2023. In addition to wildfires, extreme heat causes many health issues and can be deadly.

The Medical Officer of Health's report of November 19 states:

> *TPH's pandemic response involved outbreak management, vaccination campaigns, public education, and surveillance to help reduce severe COVID-19 disease outcomes, including deaths. TPH has assessed learnings from the pandemic response and incorporated them to prepare for future infectious diseases and other public health emergencies.*

I wish to address the issue of public education. COVID, measles, RSV, influenza, and other many other infectious diseases are primarily transmitted through the air.[12] Any future outbreak of infectious disease and public health emergency will almost certainly be due to another virus that spreads through the air. Next year, thousands of people will be coming to Toronto for the FIFA World Cup, and they may very well bring measles, polio, or an unknown virus. At the same time, climate change means we face an increasing incidence and severity of poor air quality and extreme heat days. We appreciate TPH's efforts to protect city residents but we remain concerned about the lack of awareness amongst most members of the public on how to protect against airborne diseases and air pollution, and the importance of good air quality. Unfortunately, the information we have seen thus far is not reaching its target audience.

As an example of this, the TDSB sent out its monthly newsletter on November 3, which included a hyperlink to a TPH infographic entitled "Tips for Healthier Fall & Winter" (Fig. 1). Last week, at a meeting with the Caring & Safe school committee, I asked if it was possible for staff to print out this infographic and post it within the school, and also include it in an upcoming newsletter.

Figure 1: "Tips for a Healther Fall & Winter", TPH, November 2025

None of the other members of the committee, including staff, another parent, and a student representative, had seen this infographic. I was not surprised: it is near the end of the TDSB Connects newsletter (Fig. 2), behind a hyperlink, where it is easily missed.

schools. If closures are required, information will be posted on the TDSB home page and on TDSB social media by 6 a.m.

Toronto Public Health Fall/Winter Update - Healthy students mean healthier communities. Read some simple ideas to help protect your family from illness this season. Keeping children's vaccinations up to date also helps protect both students and our wider community all year around! TPH offers clinics to make it easy for students to stay protected. Learn more.

Ombudsman Services for Students and Families – The Office of the Ombudsman recently celebrated 50 years, including 10 years of oversight of Ontario school boards. To learn how the Ombudsman can help students and families with school-related issues and concerns, please review the poster or visit the Ombudsman's school boards page.

Toronto District School Board

Figure 2: TDSB Connects November 2025 Newsletter

In addition, when I showed the infographic to the committee, the feedback received from the student representative and one of the staff was that, "This is going to get ignored", and "There's too much text, no one will bother to read it."

On October 27, 2025, TPH shared the infographic in Fig. 3 on social media, which is a depiction of the multiple layers of protection that can be used to protect against airborne diseases. As far as I know, it has not been sent to the school boards. Although it is easier to read through than the previous infographic, we are concerned that it may be misinterpreted. As most would read from left to right, the graphic appears to suggest that masks

and ventilation are less important than handwashing, but this is not the case for diseases which are transmitted through the air.

Figure 3: "Use layers of protection to protect yourself & loved ones from respiratory illness", TPH, October 2025

The corresponding Public Health Ontario infographic, "How to Protect Yourself and Others from Respiratory Viruses", shows the various protective measures with no implied hierarchy. The "Swiss cheese" diagram makes it clear that a combination of any one or more of these protective measures helps to reduce risk of infection.

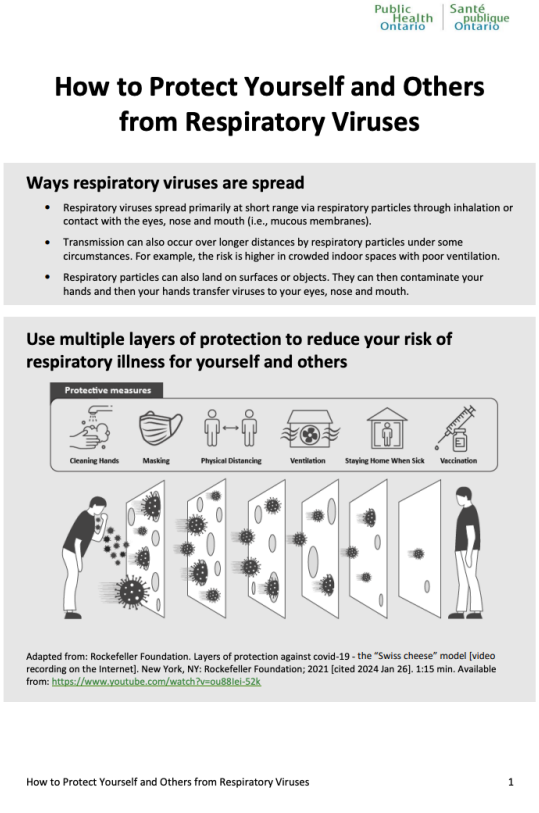

Figure 4: "How to Protect Yourself and Others from Respiratory Viruses", Public Health Ontario, March 2024

A simple, easy-to-understand infographic, “4 Steps for Self-Protection” (Fig. 5), was produced by TPH at the beginning of this year in response to a request by former Chair of the TDSB Trustees Neethan Shan. Because clear directions were never given to the school boards for sharing, this one was also not seen by the majority of the school community. This one clearly shows the importance of high-quality well-fitted masks and good air quality.

Figure 5: "4 Steps for Self-Protection", TPH, January 2025

Given that schools and child care centres are known to serve as hubs for transmission of COVID-19 and other airborne diseases to surrounding communities, it is especially important that this critical information be shared, so that we continue to protect the health of students, staff, their families, and all surrounding communities. Would it be possible to have the Public Health Ontario document and an updated version of “4 Steps for Self-Protection”, incorporating information from Health Canada’s September 2025 guidance for indoor air quality, shared with the school boards and child care centres, with clear directions that they should be printed and posted in classrooms, and included in newsletters as embedded images?

In addition to the above, we urge Toronto Public Health to consider other methods of reaching the school community that are not so reliant on online resources, such as pop-up information booths in schools, community centres and libraries, and delivering lunch & learn sessions for students and education staff.

Taking action now to bolster public education to more effectively reach target audiences will help to make our communities more resilient to the next public health emergency, as well as continue to drive down the morbidity and mortality rates due to COVID-19 infection. Taking these steps will also help to protect people from exposure to harmful air pollution from climate change, and may thus help to reduce cancers associated with environmental causes.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Hidinger, Ph.D.
Clean Indoor Air Toronto

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HL 29.2: UPDATED MORTALITY TRENDS FOR RESIDENTS OF TORONTO TORONTO BOARD OF HEALTH

NOVEMBER 24, 2025

Louise Hidinger, Ph.D.

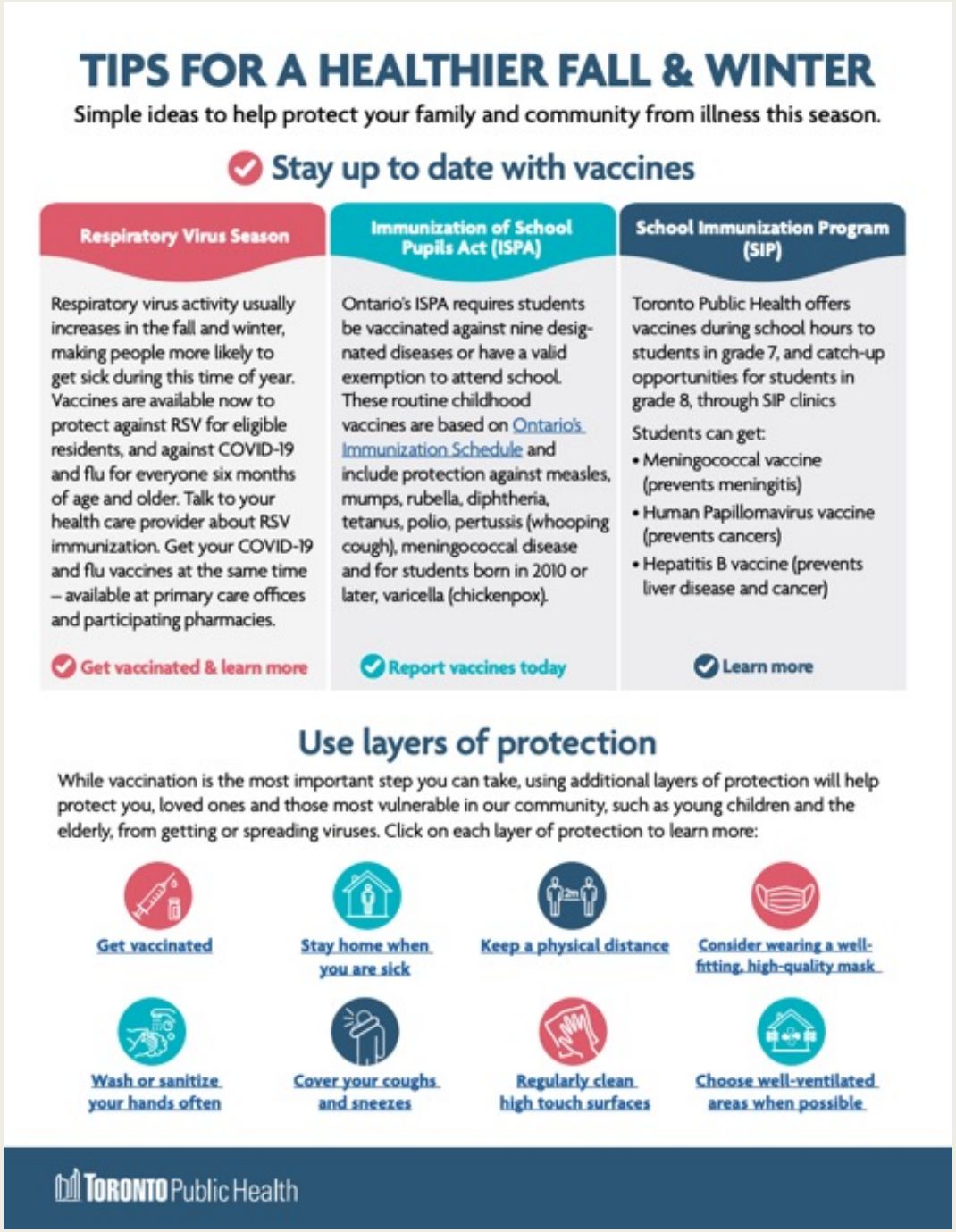
Clean Indoor Air Toronto

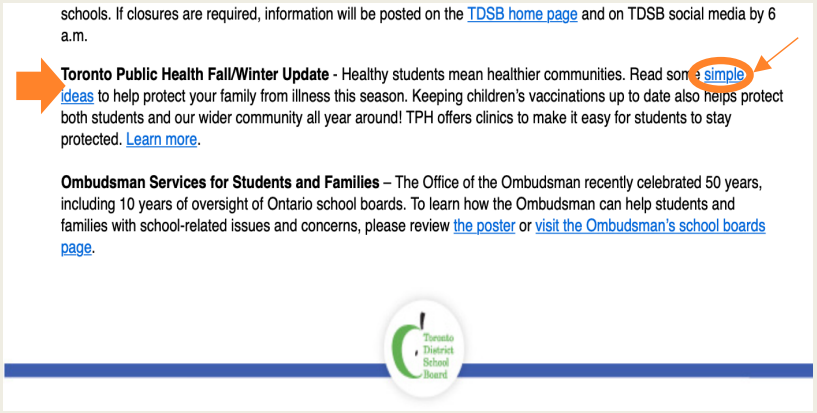
COVID-19 and climate change contribute to poor health and increased risk of mortality

- COVID-19 is associated with a significant risk of long-term, chronic health issues that increase the risk of mortality, including:
  - *Long COVID*
  - *Cardiovascular & cerebrovascular disease (eg. heart failure, stroke)*
  - *Diabetes*
  - *Neurological disorders, including Alzheimers's and dementia*
  - *Immune dysregulation*
- Climate change generates harmful air pollution: environmental carcinogens such as wildfire smoke are associated with increased rates of cancer, particularly lung cancer

Feedback on public education

- COVID-19, measles, RSV, polio, influenza, and many other infectious diseases are primarily transmitted through the air
- Most Toronto residents remain unaware of the multiple layers of protection needed for airborne disease and pollution
- Information we have seen so far is not reaching its target audience!





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Feedback received from student and staff:

"This is going to be ignored."

"There's too much text, no one will bother to read it."

Infographic hyperlinked to TDSB Connects November 2025 newsletter

Suggests there is a hierarchy of layers, with ventilation and masks being less important than handwashing

October 27, 2025

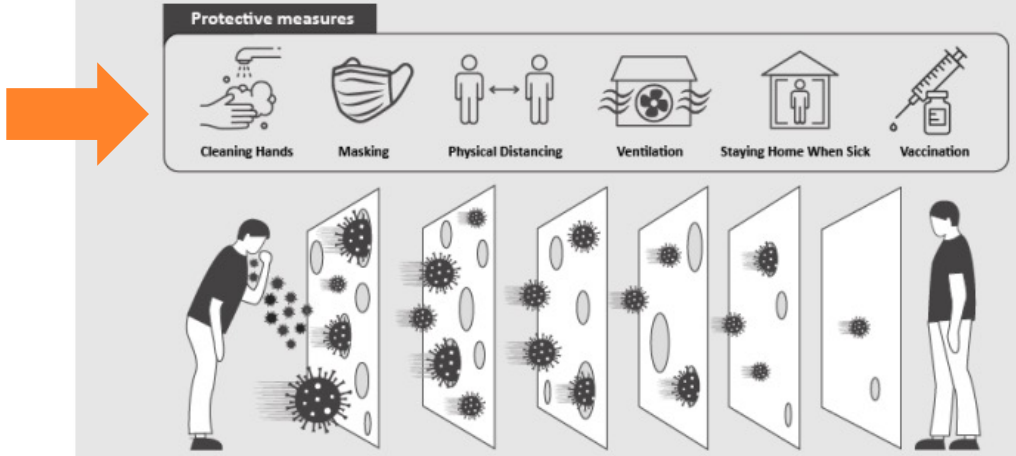
Public Health Ontario | Santé publique Ontario

How to Protect Yourself and Others from Respiratory Viruses

Ways respiratory viruses are spread

- Respiratory viruses spread primarily at short range via respiratory particles through inhalation or contact with the eyes, nose and mouth (i.e., mucous membranes).
- Transmission can also occur over longer distances by respiratory particles under some circumstances. For example, the risk is higher in crowded indoor spaces with poor ventilation.
- Respiratory particles can also land on surfaces or objects. They can then contaminate your hands and then your hands transfer viruses to your eyes, nose and mouth.

Use multiple layers of protection to reduce your risk of respiratory illness for yourself and others



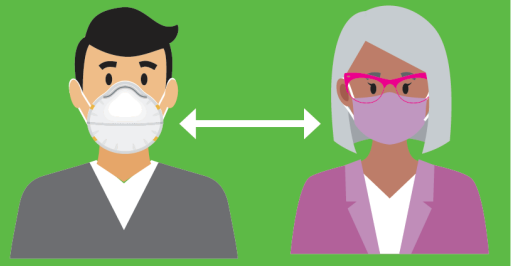
Adapted from: Rockefeller Foundation. Layers of protection against covid-19 - the "Swiss cheese" model [video recording on the Internet]. New York, NY: Rockefeller Foundation; 2021 [cited 2024 Jan 26]. 1:15 min. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ou88lei-52k

March 2024

4 STEPS FOR SELF-PROTECTION

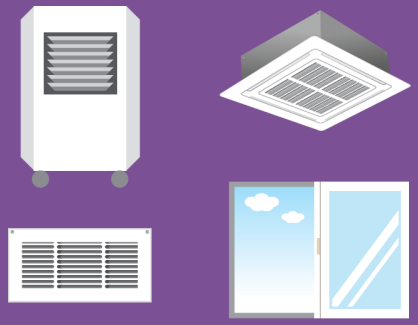
We all have a role to play to help reduce respiratory virus spread and keep our city safe.

1. Stay home & self-isolate if you are sick



2. Watch your distance

3. Wear a high-quality, well-fitted mask



4. Stay in well ventilated indoor spaces, or outdoors

TORONTO Public Health

TORONTO.CA/RESPIRATORYVIRUSES

January 2025

Public education for schools and child care centres

- Schools and child care centres are hubs for transmission of airborne diseases to surrounding communities
- Request to TPH to share:
  - *Public Health Ontario infographic*
  - *Updated version of "4 Steps for Self-Protection" with Health Canada's September 2025 IAQ guidance*
- Provide clear directions for sharing:
  - *Print and post in the building*
  - *Embed images in newsletters*

Suggestions to reach target audiences

- Clear directions to include infographics in newsletters as embedded images, not hyperlinks
- Pop-up information booths/tables in schools, community centres, and libraries
- Lunch & learn sessions for students and education staff

Clean Indoor Air Toronto