

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
March 1, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon. Today I am reporting 312 new cases of COVID-19. 298 people are in hospital, and 62 people are in the ICU. Sadly, I am reporting 1 new death.
- 1,179 cases have screened positive for mutations and are expected to be confirmed as variants of concern.
- A week ago that number was 511.
- The increase of confirmed variants of concern continues. We have 121 cases confirmed as such:
 - 117 are the U.K. variant B.1.1.7.
 - 3 are the Brazilian variant.
 - 1 is the South African variant.
- The steady identification of the variants is something we continue to watch very carefully.
- Vaccination will be vital to countering the continued spread of COVID-19 in any form and today I will describe for you the role of Toronto Public Health in vaccination delivery.
- First I want to reaffirm the goal and then the resources working to achieve it.
- As an intervention, the case for vaccines is clear.
- I have said before and am happy to say again that here in Toronto the reduction of the spread in long-term care and retirement settings tells us all we need to know about the capacity of the vaccines to substantially reverse the threat of COVID-19.

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- While vigilance is required still, the case counts and severity of illness indicate the threat to residents in long-term care and retirement homes is heading in the direction we want, particularly given the heavy price paid in those settings for most of the pandemic.
- Those results also demonstrate why the vaccination of people on a basis that considers their risk, or vulnerability, to COVID-19 is the most effective course of action – particularly where vaccinating a population delivers protection and benefit on a widespread basis.
- From a medical perspective, whatever supply we’ve got – from a little to a lot – we want to be able to deliver it to people quickly.
- The sooner we have needles in arms – and the more needles in arms we have – the better off we all are.
- Many health units around Ontario have started pre-registering residents already.
- This is a sensible course of action for them, based on their size.
- Toronto is organizing a vaccination campaign within a much more wide-ranging and complicated landscape.
- For example, our population of people 80 years of age and older, is roughly equivalent to the population of the entire city of Guelph.
- As the largest city in the country we have much more ground to cover.
- In this context we are in active partnership with the health care system in Toronto to create as much access as possible, guided by the provincial framework for prioritization for vaccination.
- As described, Toronto Public Health will deliver vaccines through the City clinics, drawing on our experience in mass vaccination campaigns.



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- We will also be able to provide pop up clinics and mobile clinics, which in practical terms means we'll be able to have mobile teams of immunizers that can be deployed wherever in Toronto they are most needed.
- To deliver the best and most effective result, vaccination levels must be as consistent as they can be, across the entire city.
- Our data can tell us if that's happening or guide adjustments to ensure that it does.
- That is a benefit for every person in Toronto.
- If there are pockets of outbreaks and spread – or places vulnerable to outbreaks and spread – it undermines the effort to reduce COVID-19 to the maximum extent possible. It creates conditions where variants can flourish – or worse, where new ones can emerge.
- Toronto Public Health is a co-chair of the Toronto Health Sector Leadership Table, established to co-ordinate the delivery of vaccines by the considerable number of organizations that can help to get the job done on the scale we're aiming for.
- This structure draws particularly on Toronto's hospital system, which has highly valuable capabilities in supporting vaccination delivery, not the least of which are deep and functioning networks into health care at the community level – as well as staff who can give vaccines.
- I'll give you the example of East Toronto Health Partners, the Ontario Health Team that is a group of more than 50 community, primary care, home care, hospital and social services organizations working together to create an integrated system of care.
- East Toronto Health Partners has already rolled out a pilot program for a mobile team delivering vaccinations to seniors living in high-risk congregate settings.



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- It intends, going forward, to expand direct delivery to seniors through this mechanism.
- East Toronto health partners are also planning to operate independent vaccination clinics in due course, dependent on the supply of vaccine.
- By working together, Toronto Public Health, with the hospitals, Ontario Health Teams, the Local Health Integration Networks, and community-based health care providers can significantly ramp up our capacity to deliver vaccinations in Toronto.
- That said, our ability depends on the supply of vaccine to which we have access.
- And, as supply increases, you can count on knowing there are systems and people in place, ready to deliver.

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