

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
May 19, 2021 at 3 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Chief Pegg, and good afternoon.
- Before I commence my remarks, I just want to note that today is Personal Support Worker Day, a day to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of personal support workers, or PSWs, everywhere.
- Whether in acute care, long-term care or in community settings, PSWs provide important daily support and services to their patients with empathy, and with caring.
- Their contributions throughout the course of the pandemic have been truly invaluable, and for this, we owe them our deepest thanks.
- Today I am reporting 751 new cases of COVID-19.
- 1,018 people are in the hospital.
- 263 people are in the ICU.
- I am saddened report nine additional deaths today.
- Looking at the numbers overall though, we see signs of hope. And as we move now toward better times, it can be easy to forget the price paid over the course of the pandemic.
- But I was reminded this morning of the seriousness and the suffering from COVID-19 when I looked at the cumulative case count and the hospitalizations in Toronto since the pandemic began.
- More than 158,000 people in Toronto have been infected with COVID-19.

- 3,285 people have lost their lives.
- More 10,000 people admitted to hospital.
- With all that in mind, today I really want to encourage you to be vaccinated – now that so many more people are eligible.
- Since yesterday, everyone age of 18 and up is eligible to book a COVID-19 vaccination appointment.
- Additionally, 12 to 17 year-olds can now be vaccinated certain pop-up and mobile clinics which began piloting this week.
- Thank you to the amazing health care partners who are delivering this access on the ground in the many communities that make up Toronto.
- There will be more over the course of the next few weeks and that planning is underway in earnest and ongoing between Toronto Public Health, the Hospital for Sick Children and other health care leaders.
- As of May 31st, 12 to 17 year-olds can book appointments through the provincial booking system and access vaccine through City-run immunization clinics and clinics based in a number of hospitals.
- And for the weeks of June 14th and 21st, there will be appointments dedicated to youth vaccination.
- In time, the widening of eligibility will make a tremendous difference in the number of people with their first vaccination.
- This increased access also creates a significant number of people all in pursuit of the same thing: vaccination.
- That may create frustration for anyone who wants a vaccine but finds that they have to wait a while because of the demand.

- I recognize there may be more demand than vaccine supply at points right now.
- I do hope that the demand persists until every resident is vaccinated, especially with the growing evidence of the protective power of vaccines.
- Some people have asked me why there is so little talk about the Moderna vaccine.
- To that I say this: scientists and doctors around the world are confident in the Moderna vaccine's ability to protect against COVID-19.
- But studies have tended to focus on Pfizer and AstraZeneca because these vaccines were available in greater supply in the first half of this year.
- I would anticipate that we'll see more studies including Moderna in the months ahead. I know the University of Oxford study of a mix-and-match approach to two-dose vaccination now includes Moderna, after originally focusing on AstraZeneca and Pfizer.
- And in that respect, yesterday there was a study released out of Spain that found the AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines can be safely and effectively mixed as first and second doses.
- Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam said yesterday she expects Canadians will have a choice about their second dose if they got an AstraZeneca as their first.
- Things change regularly on the vaccine front: supply arrives, appointments are created, vaccines are administered and antibodies build in more and more Torontonians.
- So I will close with two challenges to you today.
- First, I really do encourage you to talk about vaccination this weekend – if you've done it and you've got a story to tell – please, tell it.

- Encourage people to follow your lead, whether you are vaccinated or you're planning to be.
- At the same time, this is a holiday weekend coming up– and if I'm to be completely candid, our track record after holiday weekends could use some improvement.
- At the Board of Health meeting earlier this month I noted that after every holiday weekend over the last year or so, we've seen an increase in infections.
- That is the last thing we want, considering variants that are afoot in Toronto and that there's a significant number of people with no vaccine protection at all.
- So please, this weekend do get outside, enjoy the weather, be safe and remember, there's more at stake this holiday weekend than perhaps there has been for a very long time.
- Our summer lies ahead and in it, greater opportunity for more and for better.
- We all play a big part in making this happen – and the biggest part is what we do day by day until we get to where we want to be.

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