

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
September 8, 2021 at 2 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good afternoon.
- Last Friday, Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer, said that without more vaccinations and reduced contact between Canadians, cases could rise to 15,000 a day in October.
- That is a stark statement that echoed what was forecast by the COVID-19 Science Advisory table two days prior.
- I agree that more vaccinations and reduced contact must happen – and happen now.
- Fortunately, both are directly under the control of each and every one of us.
- Where we are today feels frustratingly familiar. Some of what I tell you today will sound familiar as well. I have said it before. I say it because it works – and because we have seen it work.
- We have a lot more flexibility in our lives, which we need to work to preserve.
- School is resuming – with a significant number of young students unvaccinated at this point.
- The best way to preserve the flexibility in life that we have – and to protect that large number of little people who can’t yet be vaccinated – is to drive up vaccination levels and adjust our contact with each other.
- Another reason on an individual level is that vaccination continues to be the best protection against ending up in hospital because of COVID-19.

- Toronto Public Health data indicates that case rates among unvaccinated individuals are approximately seven times higher than amongst those fully vaccinated.
- On top of this, based on currently available information, the vast majority of those who are in ICU, more than 90 per cent are not fully vaccinated.
- In order for Toronto to get to 90 per cent full vaccination coverage – that's two doses – approximately 336,000 more people need to complete vaccination. Some are half way there.
- At present, of those who are in between dose one and dose two, there are about 164,000 Toronto residents who are eligible for their second dose.
- We have also seen an 18 per cent increase in first dose vaccinations administered to Toronto residents since August 31. In fact, first doses administered on September 2 and September 3 were the highest we've seen in Toronto since July.
- This may have been a result of people getting vaccinated in anticipation of a return to the office or the province's announcement on proof of vaccination requirements to engage in different activities.
- Through mid-August, we surveyed Torontonians to find out what they were thinking about vaccines.
- In terms of closing the gap between where we are with vaccinations and where we want to get to – and considering the important questions around barriers due to hesitancy – we found some encouraging responses.
- We are seeing a decrease in vaccine hesitancy in Toronto residents since we surveyed them last March.
- About one in six residents – or 14 per cent – can be considered as vaccine hesitant, which includes 6 per cent who said they will definitely not receive a

COVID-19 vaccine and 8 per cent who said that they are unsure if they will in the future.

- Overall though, we have seen a 7 per cent decrease in hesitancy since residents were last surveyed in March 2021.
- The next findings are important when we think about all those children who are heading back to school, and who aren't yet able to be vaccinated.
- The vaccines are safe, proven and highly effective.
- In short, they work.
- About two-thirds of parents with children under the age of 12 indicate that they are ready to have their children receive vaccine when it becomes available.
- We want that group of parents to join the tens of thousands of parents like them who've had their children vaccinated and taken a least a little weight off their minds as a result.
- Getting back to the modelling I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, the fall months ahead of us will not be as relaxed as we might like.
- The Delta variant has not spoiled everything though, and won't – if we act to give it less room to maneuver.
- That happens through vaccination and through picking and choosing what we do and when and how and where we do it.
- The simplest yardstick for reducing contact is this: ask yourself is this something you need to do or something you want to do?
- What simple limits or adjustments can you make to your plans to reduce the number of people you interact with?

Public Health

- When you can't physical distance yourself 6 feet from others, do you have your mask handy to easily put it on?
- Can what you're doing be done outdoors or how can you make the space you're in better ventilated such as by opening windows?
- I know this is wearying and I wish I didn't have to say it.
- But I can no more fail to say it than I could fail to tell you that smoking is dangerous or to get inside when lightning threatens.
- We have all felt the frustration when asked to limit or change our activity.
- We have also all felt the satisfaction and the optimism that has flowed from those limits, because infections fell and vaccination rates rose.
- I'm with you. This is tiresome. But as Toronto's doctor I am behind you and I can assure you: we can see this through to an end.
- The best outcomes will happen soonest if we all make sure we're vaccinated and we're really, really deliberate about how often, with whom, where and how we interact with each other.