

**Update on COVID-19**  
**Dr. Na-Koshie Lamptey, Acting Medical**  
**Officer of Health**  
**December 15, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.**  
**Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.**

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- During this pandemic, many times we have all been challenged to know what this virus was going to do and how the pandemic would unfold.
- I want to acknowledge that we all want some reassurance and comfort. I understand the desire for as much information as soon as we can get it – and how confusing it can be to sort out what we know and what we do not know.
- To protect and promote the health of all residents in Toronto, at Toronto Public Health, we consider scientific evidence and how well the community is able to participate in the actions that protect our overall health.
- Right now, we see a population where people are fatigued after all the pandemic has brought us. I see exhaustion in the faces of health and public health professionals I work with who are all driven to advance your health. This also includes the staff working or community partner agencies working so to deliver their missions in challenging circumstances.
- Just a few weeks ago, we began the COVID-19 first-dose vaccine campaign for 5 to 11 year-olds in the city. We were looking toward the holiday season anticipation and hope.
- In just a few short weeks, we have discovered a new variant that brings new challenges and while we might rightly feel as though we are done with the virus, the virus is not done with us.
- The immediate future we are facing is potentially different with the emergence of the Omicron variant. I want to tell you that we do not need to abandon hope. As we enter the holiday season, I also want to remind you today of Toronto's incredible strengths and resilience that we have demonstrated over the last 2 years.

- Three weeks ago, when Omicron was designated a variant of concern by the World Health Organization, my colleague, Dr. de Villa, told Torontonians that it was only a question of "when" we would see the variant in our population – not "if".
- Omicron is indeed circulating in the Toronto population, and the variant is being monitored on local, provincial and national levels.
- As of this morning, there were 20 confirmed cases of Omicron among Toronto residents, with many more samples still undergoing sequencing in the provincial labs. With that processing time, we expect that number to rise quickly.
- Not all of the confirmed Omicron cases in Toronto are linked to travel. This means that Omicron is established and we have local community transmission.
- With any new virus or its variants, there are many elements that are to determine its impact on the population. For example,:
  - how easily the virus is transmitted from one person to another;
  - The severity of the illness it causes; and
  - If our current vaccines, tests and treatments remain effective.
- It is clear that the Omicron variant is highly transmissible. When we have suspected outbreaks with this variant, we see that the virus spreads quickly when individuals are indoors and not maintaining masking and distancing.
- As Dr. Moore told Ontarians yesterday, Omicron is infecting four to eight times more individuals than the Delta variant. It's rapidly becoming the dominant strain in Ontario.
- We are seeing a rapid increase in cases and our reproductive rate in Toronto.
- Currently, we do not fully understand the severity of the illness related to Omicron for the entire population. We expect to learn more over the coming weeks.

- Because of Omicron's high degree of transmissibility and rapid spread, there is potential for a large number of infections. Even a small proportion of a large number could strain our healthcare system.
- We are observing – both in Toronto and around the world – that two doses of COVID-19 vaccine are not as effective against preventing infection from the Omicron variant compared to previous variants.
- There is new information about how a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine increases the body's immune response built by the first two vaccine doses.
- Given what we know about Omicron's ability to spread rapidly, providing people with as much protection as possible is our leading concern – particularly as we come into a long season where people have increased close contact indoors.
- At Toronto Public Health we have been responding to cases, notifying the public when individual contacts cannot be identified, and increasing our digital outreach to respond to volumes quickly as we follow changing provincial guidelines.
- Currently, the provincial guidance is that high risk contacts of suspected Omicron cases have to isolate regardless of their vaccination status.
- The more we can slow down the virus, fewer number of people will have to isolate due to exposure.
- As you heard from the Mayor, we are making every effort to increase vaccination opportunities across the City – including for first, second and third doses.
- I want to recognize that in face of this serious situation, we have many things still within our control. Toronto –again, your resilience is remarkable.
- We're asking you to continue to be part of the response. Protect yourself - protect each other.

- Today, I cannot stress this enough – if you are not fully vaccinated or eligible for a booster dose, please get your next dose as soon as possible to reduce the chance of serious illness. If you are not vaccinated, please schedule a dose because this variant spreads so quickly and easily.
- To protect and enjoy our holiday season, we need to reduce our in-person connections with other people as much as possible right now.
- Over the holiday season, limit the number and size of gatherings you attend.
- Reducing in-person contact is the fastest way to slow this virus. That is why Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore, has requested that employers ask their employees to work from home whenever possible.
- What we do now will affect all of us in the weeks to come. Continue to remain home when you are ill. Continue to wear a well-fitting, multilayer, breathable mask when you are indoors or cannot maintain a safe physical distance.
- Thank you to all who continue to make good public health choices in an unrelenting situation, to keep your households and our community safe.
- And with that, I will turn to Chief Pegg to deliver his remarks.