

**Update on COVID-19**  
**Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health**  
**December 23, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.**  
**Woodbine Mall, 500 Rexdale Blvd.**

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- Thank you, Mayor Tory, and good afternoon.
- As this is my first my update following my medical leave, I'd like to take a moment to sincerely thank Toronto residents, colleagues, and members of the media who sent supportive messages after I announced my leave of absence. I read every single one of your texts, tweets and e-mails. Thank you. I'm grateful for your kindness and your support of me and the team at Toronto Public Health.
- I also want to take a moment to thank my colleagues at Toronto Public Health for their continued leadership during my absence.
- Today, we find ourselves in the upswing of another wave of COVID-19, dealing with the newest COVID-19 variant, Omicron, which is bringing us new challenges to face.
- While we're quickly learning about the nature of Omicron, there are some things that are becoming very clear in Ontario and here in Toronto.
- Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, shared earlier this week that early evidence indicates that Omicron is up to eight times more transmissible than the Delta variant.
- He also shared that as of last week Omicron is the dominant virus strain in Ontario and provincial hospitalizations have increased by 9% in the past week.
- In Toronto, our situation has progressed quickly. We're now seeing more than 1,000 COVID-19 cases each day and even more you can expect in the several days. And a steady increase in our percent positivity and the reproductive number.

- This isn't where we want to be, especially during the holiday season and after the past 22 plus months that we've all endured. I know it's exhausting and I know this can be frustrating.
- As we said last week, we may be done with this pandemic, but this virus isn't yet done with us.
- So what can you do? My message today is simple, it's about what we know works and what is within our control.
- We know that vaccines protect us by preventing virus spread and mutations in the first place. Vaccination and boosters provide the best protection we have particularly against severe disease.
- This is why it's more important than ever to ensure you are vaccinated to protect yourself and those around you --- especially those who are elderly or may be more vulnerable to the effects of this virus.
- The best vaccine for your booster dose is the vaccine that's available, as Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines both provide the best protection we have against this virus and its variants.
- Over the past week, our Team Toronto partners have been increasing the capacity of vaccine administration. We've increased our capacity as you just heard to give vaccines from 400,000 doses per month to now more than 1.2 million doses per month.
- And we're continuing to look at innovative ways to increase our capacity and vaccine availability across the city.
- As the Mayor just stated yesterday, Team Toronto Partners provided almost 46,000 booster doses. This is an incredible achievement approaching the peak vaccination levels we achieved earlier this summer.

- I am truly grateful of the leadership of all my colleagues across the health system – hospital partners, Ontario Health Teams, primary care, community health organizations and the more than 500 pharmacies who along with Toronto Public Health clinics, are working extremely hard to make sure these vaccines are as accessible as possible to you.
- Thanks to the efforts of all these partners, we have achieved in mere days the vaccination levels that took weeks to achieve in the summer.
- As challenging as things have been with Omicron so far, we have a number of tools to protect ourselves and each other. We know how the virus spreads and we know that public health measures, and measures for self-protection help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- After so many months apart, with provincial gathering limits of now 10 people indoors and 25 outdoors, you are being asked to reduce the size of your gatherings over the holidays and to attend fewer gatherings to reduce your contacts.
- I appreciate that this is not what we would have wished for our holidays, but this is needed to prevent virus spread, to protect our families, our friends and our communities.
- This holiday season, I am asking you once again to explore creative ways to connect while remaining safe.
- Consider meeting with friends and family outdoors or virtually. If you are meeting indoors in a small group with other vaccinated individuals, open a window to increase ventilation.
- Please also remember to wear a well-fitting mask, wash your hands, maintain two metres physical distance with individuals outside your household, and of course, stay at home when you're sick.
- Finally, please take care of yourself. Get outside for fresh air and some exercise as you're able.

- Our city and our residents are incredibly strong and resilient. Throughout the pandemic, Torontonians have continued to demonstrate their strength and their resilience -- and I know we can get through this latest challenge together.
- Have a safe and happy holiday. Please take good care of yourselves and each other.

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**Media contact:** [tphmedia@toronto.ca](mailto:tphmedia@toronto.ca)