

**Update on COVID-19**  
**Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health**  
**January 10, 2022 at 11:00 a.m.**  
**Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.**

---

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good morning.
- In recent weeks, we have seen a surge of cases as a result of the highly contagious omicron variant spreading in the community. Hospitalizations and ICU admissions have also risen.
- As provincial testing resources are overwhelmed and exhausted with such widespread infection, indicators like the number of outbreaks, hospitalizations, and ICU admissions are particularly important to understand the nature of the pandemic at the moment.
- We continue to see COVID-19 outbreaks in congregate settings, of which the majority – a little more than 50 per cent – are in hospitals, long-term care facilities and retirement homes.
- While this is unfortunate, Toronto Public Health and our health care partners will continue to work intensively with all congregate settings to contain outbreaks as quickly as possible and to prevent future outbreaks through focused infection, prevention and control, isolation and vaccination.
- The increase in outbreaks also demonstrates the extremely high-level of transmissibility of the Omicron variant.
- Because of the virus' high-degree of transmissibility, I want to encourage all Toronto residents to get their booster dose of vaccine as soon as possible.
- It is important for residents to receive this layer of protection against COVID-19, as it helps to increase vaccine protection that may have decreased since the second dose.

- You may have seen some reports in the media that our health care partners – including pharmacies – are seeing some individuals refuse the Moderna vaccine and opting to wait for future Pfizer shipments from the federal and provincial governments.
- In our immunization clinics, run by the city of Toronto, Toronto Public Health, we are seeing about 2 to 3 per cent of individuals walk away at the time of their appointment, declining Moderna and choosing to wait for Pfizer instead.
- I encourage you not to wait for your booster or third dose of COVID-19 vaccine, but to take the first vaccine available to you.
- The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine has been shown to be as effective or, in some studies, more effective at protecting individuals against hospitalization, ICU admission and death than the vaccine from Pfizer.
- What's more, it is also safe and effective to receive what we call a "mixed dose" series – or a first, second and third dose of COVID-19 vaccine that are not the same vaccine brand.
- And, if you are over the age of 60 and you have not received a third dose of vaccine, I strongly encourage you to do so without delay.
- The risk of complications such as hospitalization related to a potential breakthrough infection prior to receipt of a third dose increases as your age increases.
- Toronto Public Health data show that individuals above 60 have a much higher risk of hospitalization due to a breakthrough COVID-19 infection.
- The immune system is less robust in older individuals likely leading to more advanced loss of protection from two doses of vaccine.
- This means that if you are over the age of 60, you have a higher likelihood of serious complications from COVID-19 infection.

- You need your third dose of vaccine as soon as possible – and as I have said already, please don't hesitate based on the brand of vaccine offered. The vaccines we are offering are safe and effective. And remember, the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine has been shown to be as effective or, in some studies, more effective at protecting individuals against hospitalization, ICU admission and death than the vaccine from Pfizer.
- I also want to encourage parents to vaccinate their eligible children, and for expectant mothers to get vaccinated in order to pass on antibodies to their newborns, who are too young to get vaccinated.
- These vaccines are safe, they are effective, and they are the best way to protect children from short term and long-term health impacts from COVID-19.
- I know the next few weeks will challenge us as research and the experiences of other jurisdictions suggest that the Omicron wave will reach its peak in this time.
- Please do everything you can to protect yourselves and your communities including vaccination.
- We at Toronto Public Health will continue to do everything we can as we continue to heading up the curve of this COVID-19 wave.
- It is important to remember that pandemics wane, and they do end. Through our concerted individual and collective efforts, we will get through this.
- Time and again, Torontonians have come together and pushed through the most difficult periods of this pandemic.

- I have been and continue to be inspired by that resilience and collective will that I have seen from Torontonians, and so thankful for the incredible efforts and sacrifices that so many of you have made to protect and support one another.

-30-

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