

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
January 4, 2022 at 12:00 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good afternoon.
- First – let me take this opportunity to wish you all a happy new year.
- Many of us are approaching this New Year with hope tempered with some caution – and that's understandable.
- We start 2022 in the throes of a new wave of COVID-19 infection. The Omicron variant has rapidly become the dominant variant in Ontario, with evidence of high transmissibility compared to previous strains.
- And many of us are now experiencing first-hand just how contagious the Omicron variant is.
- COVID-19 is hitting closer to home than ever before– with many of our friends and acquaintances, colleagues and co-workers becoming sick with COVID-19 or isolating because they are a high-risk contact of someone who has COVID-19.
- We might even get COVID-19 ourselves – and with such a highly contagious variant – we must take the slightest symptoms seriously, and isolate right away to help protect others.
- For those of you who remain well, if you can help someone who has fallen ill – by dropping off food or just calling to check in on them – please do so.

- The Omicron variant is now, as expected, widely circulating in Toronto. While early data suggest that Omicron results in less severe disease, we are seeing its capacity to give rise to a high number of cases. And even though only a small percentage of those cases have severe disease, we are already seeing an impact on our health care system through increased hospitalizations for COVID. As omicron continues to spread further, this impact on health care will become even more pronounced.
- In addition to impacting our health care system, a high number of cases and widespread illness can lead to record levels people being off work due to illness which also puts at risk the essential services that Torontonians rely on every day. Services like paramedics and fire and water treatment and groceries.
- We are facing a new challenge with Omicron as we enter 2022 – but we have the tools to face it head on. This may be a new variant, but we have knowledge and experience that we have acquired over the past couple of years. We can better confront this variant and use what we know to protect ourselves, and especially those who are most vulnerable.
- So today I have a clear message to each and every Torontonian. The Mayor just told you everything the City is doing to protect the services you rely upon. You should know that we, at Toronto Public Health are also doing our part. For starters, we are helping to protect you by continuing to work with our partners to ensure widespread and timely access to vaccines.
- And now, with in-person learning scheduled to resume on January 17, Toronto Public Health is doing everything we can to support our local school boards and the province in order for them to reopen schools and reactivate this essential activity for our young people. In addition to vaccines for staff, students and their families, Toronto Public Health also provides guidance and support to schools on infection prevention and control and measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

- I also have a clear ask of every resident of Toronto – I ask that you please do your part as well to help protect each other: Reduce your in-person contacts as much as possible. Mask up. Get vaccinated.
- We need to take very seriously the task of decreasing our contact with individuals outside our household as much as possible. The more we are interacting with others outside our households, the more possibility COVID has to spread.
- And if you feel ill --- stay home --- even if it's a mild illness. It's just not worth the risk.
- Second – Wear a well-fitting mask at all times when in indoor spaces other than your home and as well in public settings. With a more contagious variant, mask wearing is especially important. As stated by Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, any mask is better than no mask, but some masks are better than others.
- Given how transmissible Omicron is, upgrade your mask, if possible. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends wearing a high-quality mask such as blue surgical mask or a non-fit tested KN/N95 respirator. Regardless, all masks should rest snugly above the nose, below the mouth, and on the sides of the face.
- And finally – get vaccinated. Team Toronto delivered more than 650,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine over the month of December. And we are doing everything we can to ensure vaccines continue to be delivered in widespread basis and in a timely fashion as is possible.
- If you're already vaccinated, consider helping others who are not yet vaccinated to get vaccinated – people may need assistance with booking, they may need assistance with transportation. When it comes to vaccination, every little bit helps.

- Over the course of the pandemic, I have seen first-hand how Toronto residents can pull together and use the tools we have to help slow down the spread of COVID-19, so that we can preserve and protect essential services in our community. I'm asking Torontonians to do this again.
- What kind of future we have over next the several weeks depends on what we do right now.
- I know that we are all tired but I am inspired by the resilience that Torontonians have demonstrated time and time again. As we have done before, I know we can get through this together, by looking after ourselves and each other.

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