

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
January 12, 2022 at 11:00 a.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good afternoon.
- Media reports over the last few days have indicated that the province plans to move students back to in-person learning next Monday, January 17.
- I appreciate that many teachers, education workers, parents – and indeed many students – are eager to understand what this means for them.
- First, let me acknowledge all of the teachers, staff, parents and guardians, school administrators, and students who have remained engaged and committed over these last few weeks.
- I have frequently thought about those, in particular, who parent young children and the dedicated teachers who keep those same young children engaged through online learning. I know that you are often moving mountains to keep learning happen in the midst of so many other pressures.
- As a parent, I can appreciate that, regardless of whether you believe kids should be back in the classroom or remaining in online learning, everyone who parents or cares for a child is weighing the risks of keeping their children isolated at home when engaged in online learning, against the risk of exposure to the Omicron variant when children are outside the home.
- Amongst health professionals, we know that in-person learning is an essential activity to children's mental health and development, as well as their educational progress.
- At this time, we must all continue to do our part to preserve in-person learning, and keep our schools as safe as possible for kids, teachers, and our essential education workers.

- While education is the responsibility of the province, throughout the pandemic, Toronto Public Health has supported our local school boards and independent schools to implement measures that promote a safe learning environment.
- Toronto Public Health will continue to support schools by providing guidance for public health and infection, prevention, protection and control measures in order to protect students and staff. Things like daily screening for symptoms by students and staff, physical distancing, and mask use to name just a few.
- The Province of Ontario released new interim guidance for schools and childcare settings late Monday in order to support in-person learning during the Omicron wave. We are awaiting further communication from the Province later today on the new school guidance and will continue to work with the Province and local school boards as we receive further provincial direction.
- Toronto Public Health will continue to focus on vaccine education and providing dedicated immunization clinics for all eligible children and youth, as well as third doses for childcare and education staff.
- Since November 1, Team Toronto has held more than 250 school vaccination clinics across the City. Collectively, we will continue to augment our mobile vaccination teams to continue to bring doses directly to communities --- particularly those who require focused efforts and outreach to increase vaccine uptake.
- Vaccination is one of the key actions parents and caregivers can take to protect their children as they head back to the classroom. And we know that vaccination against COVID-19 is one of the best measures of protection for our community overall.
- We have a great deal of information and evidence that the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for children and youth. They have undergone rigorous testing and approvals processes, and have been safely administered to millions of children and youth in Canada and around the world.

- I know that this is a stressful time for many. Our collective efforts can keep school environments as safe as possible so that children can enjoy all the benefits of in-person learning.
- I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the many Toronto Public Health staff and our partners in the healthcare and education sectors who have gone to great lengths to maintain classroom learning throughout the pandemic.
- To the many parents who have adapted time and time again as the pandemic has evolved, thank you for your patience and going above and beyond to supporting your children in the midst of so much uncertainty.
- And finally, to every child and young person in Toronto who has persisted in their studies over the past two years, I know this has not been easy. Know that your perseverance and commitment to learning is exceptional, and I want to assure you that we will continue to make every effort to keep your schools as safe as possible.

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Media contact: tphmedia@toronto.ca