

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
January 28, 2022 at 11:00 a.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good morning.
- While Omicron continues to spread in the community, we are seeing signs that cases may have peaked and have started to decline, and that the individual and collective efforts Toronto residents have made to lessen the impact of COVID-19 are paying off.
- Although Provincial testing capacity remains limited, and the true number of COVID-19 cases is higher than what is reflected in reports, we have seen a decrease in the 7-day moving average of COVID-19 cases in Toronto from 1,414 cases on January 19, to 871 cases on January 25.
- The percent positivity of COVID-19 tests has also decreased week-over-week from 20.3 per cent to 16.6 per cent, as of the end of last week.
- In the absence of widespread COVID-19 testing, Toronto Public Health continues to monitor COVID-19 activity in the community using a number of different data sources.
- For example, the number of active outbreaks in institutions and in congregate settings has declined overall, which is a positive indication of a decline of COVID-19 in the community.
- Wastewater surveillance – or testing Toronto sewage for the presence of COVID-19 – looks at changes over time, helping us understand the presence of COVID-19 in a community regardless of the testing strategy that is in place.
- Beginning today, Toronto Public Health is making wastewater surveillance data available to the public as part of its regular COVID-19 surveillance reporting.

- Ontario's wastewater surveillance is coordinated and hosted by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.
- Ryerson University and the University of Toronto complete laboratory analyses on wastewater samples collected by the City of Toronto.
- The wastewater surveillance data on the City of Toronto website are analyzed at the provincial level through this Ministry, who then summarizes the data from the four wastewater treatment plants in the City of Toronto. Toronto Public Health will update the wastewater surveillance report on Wednesdays moving forward.
- The latest analysis shows that the declines noted in the wastewater signal across most of Toronto's wastewater treatment plants over the last few weeks are now showing signs of slowing or plateauing.
- However, taken all together, there are certainly encouraging signs, and while they give reason for optimism, we must remain cautious, especially as in-person interactions will increase following the loosening of Provincial restrictions on January 31.
- We continue to see a large number of people being admitted to hospital and intensive care on a daily basis, and our healthcare system's capacity is still stretched thin. Currently, there are 575 Toronto residents in hospital with COVID-19 and 93 people in ICU.
- You have also likely heard recent reports of a new Omicron subvariant, called BA.2. At this time, we have limited information about BA.2 and how it may differ from the Omicron variant that is the current dominant variant circulating in our communities.
- For now, it is sensible to remain cautious.

- Given these developments, and in anticipation of increased in-person interaction following the removal of certain Provincial restrictions on January 31, it remains critical that we all continue to do our part to minimize the spread and impact of COVID-19, by taking the steps that have been proven to work, time and again.
- This includes getting vaccinated, reducing our contacts, wearing a well-fitted high-quality medical mask, practising physical distancing, increasing ventilation, and staying home when we are sick.
- While these measures slow the spread and impact of COVID-19, Omicron is highly contagious.
- And as more and more Torontonians encounter Omicron, we expect that immune protection from COVID-19 will rise in the community as a result of prior infection. This is expected to occur because the body's immune response to COVID-19 infection will provide some protective effect against future infection.
- However, the amount of protection this provides varies from person to person. This also comes at the risk of experiencing serious health impacts and potential long-term side effects from a COVID-19 infection. This protection gained through infection may also wane over time, or be less effective at preventing re-infection by different variants of the virus.
- The COVID-19 vaccines offer a much more consistent immune response, and as a result, more reliable protection against COVID-19. I strongly recommend that all eligible individuals get vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19, including those who have recovered from a recent case of COVID-19.
- As I shared earlier this week, Team Toronto is focusing its efforts on a hyper-local mobile and pop-up clinic strategy that brings the COVID-19 vaccine to people where they live, work, study, and play.

- Thanks to an ample supply of both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, and the amazing efforts of Toronto Public Health staff and our Team Toronto partners, there are many vaccination opportunities available for eligible Torontonians in the coming days and weeks.
- Each dose delivered represents another step towards blunting the impact of COVID-19, and gives me hope that we will soon move on from this challenging time.
- I know this has not been easy, and I remain ever grateful for the many Torontonians, who have stepped up, again and again, to do their part. Thanks to your efforts, we will get through this together.