

**Update on COVID-19**  
**Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health**  
**January 25, 2022 at 11:30 a.m.**  
**Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.**

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- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good morning.
- Today, marks exactly two years since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Toronto.
- There is no question that since that Saturday morning, two years ago, COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges and has affected every facet of our lives.
- Sadly, we have experienced enormous losses over the past two years. As of January 24, 3,943 Toronto residents have lost their lives to COVID-19, and thousands more have been admitted to the hospital or to intensive care.
- I extend my deepest sympathies to all those who experienced tragedy because of this virus, and my sincere thanks to the healthcare workers, families and friends who have provided care and support to those in need.
- This pandemic has had a profound impact on how we have lived our lives.
- Whether adapting to new ways of working, learning, parenting, or socializing with friends and family, we have been stretched in ways we probably never expected.
- Still, I also see reasons for hope and optimism. Torontonians have demonstrated an incredible collective strength and resilience. Your commitment to care for each other and to do everything within your power to stop the spread of COVID-19 is inspiring.
- We have also come a long way in our understanding of COVID-19, and in our ability to respond to it.

- Thanks to the never-ceasing efforts of Toronto Public Health staff, healthcare workers, researchers and scientists, and essential workers across the city, we are in a much better position to fight the spread of COVID-19 than we were two years ago.
- We have safe and effective vaccines. We know that measures like masking, physical distancing, increasing ventilation, reducing our contacts, and staying home when we are sick all help to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.
- As we find ourselves in the midst of the Omicron wave, it is clear that these measures are having an impact.
- Despite record case counts, we are seeing less severe outcomes, especially among those who have had three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- And while Omicron may be less severe than the Delta variant, it is clear that vaccines are having an impact. Vaccinated and boosted individuals have been hospitalized and admitted to the ICU at much lower rates than those who are unvaccinated.
- And since vaccine is one of our most effective tools to reduce the impact of COVID-19, our efforts to vaccinate as many Toronto residents as possible have not stopped for more than a year.
- When eligibility for third doses expanded in December, we increased our capacity quickly, creating as many vaccination opportunities as possible.
- This included operating our Immunization Clinics seven days a week, and working with our partners to make vaccines available at community-based clinics, pharmacies, and family doctors' offices across the City. This has been nothing short of remarkable and my thanks go out to all who made this happen.
- However, our work is not yet done. In the coming weeks, Team Toronto will shift our focus to a data-driven hyper-local mobile and pop-up clinic strategy.

- We are again focusing on a local and community-based vaccination opportunities to increase vaccine uptake – particularly for pediatric and third doses – in neighbourhoods where vaccination coverage is lower than the Toronto average.
- I am sure many of you recall when, earlier last year, we brought vaccine clinics to malls, subway stations, places of worship, community centres, workplaces and other community settings.
- With our Team Toronto partners, we will again focus our efforts and resources to returning to these settings and bringing the vaccine to people where they live, work, study, and play.
- To do this, Toronto Public Health will be roughly doubling our mobile staff resources over the next several weeks.
- We will continue our focused outreach with 155 community agencies, 410 neighbourhood ambassadors, and hundreds of thousands of phone calls and text messages to support people getting vaccinated.
- We will also continue our efforts to maximize vaccine uptake among 5 to 11 year-olds, their families and their households, and those that work in and support schools and child care settings.
- In partnership with school boards and schools across Toronto, we will continue to provide school-based clinics both during and after the school day.
- While our Toronto Public Health Immunization Clinics will remain an important component of our vaccination strategy, providing both booked and increasingly walk-in appointments, we will be shifting some staff and resources to allow us to maximize community- and neighbourhood-specific vaccination opportunities.

- Last week, the Province announced plans to begin to loosen some restrictions as of January 31. As that date approaches and in-person interactions increase, it will be important that we all do our part to increase vaccine coverage, and support safe reopening.
- We have all been through so much over the past two years. Let's reflect on all that we have been through and all that we have learned. Let's protect the progress we have made, and together, look to the year ahead with optimism and with hope.

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