

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
January 20, 2022 at 10:00 a.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good morning.
- Yesterday, the Chief Medical Officer of Health noted recent declines in COVID-19 cases and test positivity. I am encouraged to see those trends occurring at the local level here in Toronto, as well.
- Although provincial testing capacity remains limited, and the true number of COVID-19 cases is higher than what we can report, we have seen a decrease in the 7-day moving average of COVID-19 cases in Toronto from 1,854 on January 11 to 1,414 on January 19.
- The percent positivity of COVID-19 tests has also decreased from 23.8 per cent to 20.3 per cent over the same period.
- Wastewater surveillance is an additional COVID-19 surveillance tool that involves the testing of sewage samples for the presence of the COVID-19 virus and helps us track potential trends in COVID-19 prevalence.
- This surveillance can be helpful as it provides some insight into the COVID-19 activity in the community – which is particularly valuable when testing is limited.
- Toronto Public Health has been collaborating with academic partners over the course the pandemic to implement a pilot to understand and validate wastewater surveillance.
- These data have shown that wastewater signals have lined up with clinical data, and show potential as a way to confirm trends noted in other data sources.

- When we consider COVID-19 surveillance wastewater data in Toronto from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks from December 9 to January 8, there may be evidence of a potential plateau or even a slight decline virus activity detected in Toronto.
- All of these COVID-19 indicator I've just mentioned – our 7-day moving average, test positivity and wastewater surveillance – are high, but the decreases are reasons for cautious optimism.
- While these are encouraging developments, it is still too early to confirm whether the Omicron wave has peaked. The experience of other jurisdictions suggests that this will occur sometime in January, and as additional data become available in the coming weeks, I expect we will have a clearer picture.
- For now, we must remain vigilant. Since Tuesday, hospitalizations, ICU admissions, and outbreaks have risen, and health care system capacity remains strained. We can expect this trend to continue into February, even after cases peak, and we need to continue to do all we can to preserve our health system's capacity during this very challenging time.
- As the Omicron variant is so contagious, more and more of us are encountering COVID-19 first-hand, whether we have contracted it ourselves, or have friends or family who have fallen ill. To all those who are battling COVID-19, I wish you a full and speedy recovery.
- While many of us will not be able to avoid Omicron, we can take all of the measures possible to keep from contracting the virus or spreading it: continue to limit our in-person contacts, wear a high-quality and well-fitting mask, and of course, get vaccinated.
- We have strong evidence from Ontario that the COVID-19 vaccine remains highly effective at preventing severe outcomes from Omicron, including hospitalization and admission to the ICU.

- As the Mayor just reiterated, for cases reported between December 24 and January 6, in Ontario, the rate of hospitalization for COVID-19 was four times higher for unvaccinated individuals than for those with three doses of vaccine – and the rate of ICU admission was eight times higher for those who are unvaccinated.
- As of January 17, approximately 87 per cent of Toronto residents aged 12 and up have received at least two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, and nearly 42 per cent have received a third dose that provides an important boost in protection against Omicron. We also continue to make progress towards vaccinating 5-11 year olds, with 51 per cent percent of Toronto residents in this age group now having at least one dose of the vaccine.
- I am so encouraged to see Torontonians' continued commitment to vaccination – and Toronto continues to be a world leader among large municipalities in this regard.
- Toronto Public Health and our Team Toronto partners continue to expand opportunities for eligible Torontonians to get vaccinated with a first, second, or third dose as you just heard from Mayor Tory.
- I know that we are all looking forward to the day when public health measures and restrictions are scaled back, or no longer necessary.
- Two years into the pandemic, I remain impressed by your continued resolve, resiliency, and adaptability in confronting the challenge the virus, in all its variants, has posed.
- These efforts are paying off, and will continue to do so if we all continue to do our part. This pandemic will end. For now, I ask that you continue to do all that you can to protect the gains we have made.