

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
March 10, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.
1940 Eglinton Ave. E

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good morning.
- As I speak with you today, I can't help but reflect that it was almost exactly 2 years ago to the day that the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Within a few short days after this announcement, I stood before you to ask that you make sacrifices to keep you and all of Toronto safe. I made recommendations to temporarily close dine-in restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and theatres. In that time of great uncertainty, you responded in incredible ways. You stayed home. You stayed apart. You looked after each other. And since then, every time I asked of you to keep one another safe, you did so. Fast forward from those early days, it is clear we have come a long way.
- COVID-19 is clearly receding, but not disappearing entirely.
- Our current COVID-19 indicators are all trending in the right direction.
- Toronto is one of the three jurisdictions in Ontario with the lowest incidence rates at this point in time.
- And Toronto's vaccination coverage is not only very high, it is amongst the highest in the world compared to other big cities.
- Almost 90 per cent of residents 12 years of age and older have received at least two doses of vaccine.
- And just over 64% percent of eligible people 18 and over have also received their third dose.
- If you have not yet done so, it is still very important you get your booster — and it's not too late.

- Think back to around this time last year, when so many of us desperately wanted a first dose of vaccine.
- A year later, it's never been simpler to get vaccinated. First, second or third dose. Whether it's through one of our city-run clinics (like the one we are in today) or at a local pop-up clinic or at a pharmacy or from your doctor.
- Yesterday I recommended that City Council allow Toronto's Mask Bylaw to expire, concurrent with the end of the province's masking regulations and Council voted to do so.
- And so, over the next several weeks, what is required from each of us is evolving.
- What is asked of each of us still stands.
- Lifting masking requirements doesn't mean masks are no longer good tools or useful protections.
- Some people will still need to wear them, because of their health.
- Some people will choose to wear them, because they feel more comfortable doing so.
- I absolutely recommend the use of well-fitted, high-quality masks, as needed, particularly in crowded indoor settings, and as we monitor the level of COVID in the city and adapt to living like we used to, but with COVID as a fact of life.
- During the worst of COVID this big city of three million people found a sense of community that felt more like a small village.
- We came to understand the strengths and vulnerabilities in the many neighbourhoods that make up our city.
- And so I hope that as we move forward, every one of us holds on to the generosity of spirit and understanding that helped us through the fear and frustration of COVID-19 at its worst.

- And I would ask that we never forget those who we have lost. Over 4,200 people in Toronto have died from COVID-19 so far during this pandemic. To those of you who are grieving the loss of a loved one, there are no words to adequately speak to your loss, except to say that you are not forgotten, just as you will not forget those who are gone.
- As I conclude, let me express some quick thanks today. For so long the gentlemen here with me today have been a part of my day to day life in ways I would never have imagined.
- There will be other times to acknowledge Mayor Tory and Councillor Cressy, but today I wish to acknowledge the contributions of the COVID-19 Incident Commander, Chief Matthew Pegg who is returning to his role as Toronto's Fire Chief. He has been instrumental in all that we have achieved in our COVID response. No matter how big or how challenging the task in front of us, he always got the job done, marshalling his remarkable team to deliver for the people who live here. Chief Pegg is a calm, thoughtful, considered and considerate leader and a true hero in every sense. He is my colleague and my friend, and I am eternally grateful for his wisdom and his constant support.
- I also want to thank the people at Toronto Public Health. And I say people because that's who they are - people, who like everyone in Toronto, lived through the fears and uncertainties of COVID-19. And at the same time their job was to help subdue it. They were pushed and pushed and pushed beyond anything I could have imagined asking of them. They are my heroes and they are your heroes, too.
- I am optimistic about the future but mindful of the facts.
- As we go forward, cases will go up - we've seen it happen all around the world as restrictions lift - and it is expected here as well.
- We will adapt as need be.
- We can still live well with COVID in our midst. At the same time, we will always be ready to respond to its next move.

- I know that getting to this point there were times the decisions we took seemed to make life harder, not easier. And I think of all of you who paid a heavier price than others.
- I was strengthened throughout the pandemic by the many, many times the people of Toronto rose to the challenge - keeping your distance, keeping apart, masking up, getting vaccinated. All of it brought us to this point.
- Among the most important things a doctor can do is to guide people through some of the worst moments of their lives. It's part of the job.
- I have tried to do my job for you as best as I could, using my head and my heart.
- I am grateful for your support and am hopeful as we are entering this new phase that holds so much promise - a phase when Toronto Public Health and I will probably be much less visible. Some people may welcome that. I'm one of them.
- But visible or not, at Toronto Public Health we will continue to work hard to help realize the promise of the weeks and months ahead.
- Thank you.