

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
March 2, 2022 at 2:00 p.m.
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good afternoon.
- With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, it is understandable that there are questions and mixed feelings amongst many of us.
- For some, these steps could not come soon enough. Others are concerned that these steps will only set us back, or are being relaxed too quickly.
- We have lived with COVID-19 for two very long years.
- Given what we have lived through together, these feelings are entirely understandable – particularly as we have trusted these measures to manage the health risks associated with COVID-19 for such a lengthy period.
- Over the last two years, we have dramatically changed how we live and how interact with each other.
- Earlier in the pandemic, as we sought to better understand COVID-19 and the new global threat it posed, we took significant and necessary actions at a societal level to keep each other safe.
- Together, we stayed at home if and when we could. We stayed apart from family and from friends. We changed how our children and youth learned. We drastically changed how we work and how we do business. We changed the way we lived.
- These measures were necessary to prevent loss of life; to prevent serious illness; to protect our hospitals and healthcare systems from being overwhelmed; and to make every attempt to blunt the spread of this new virus.

- At the same time, we have watched science unfold before us at an extraordinary pace.
- Though there is still much to learn about COVID-19, the investment in monitoring and research over the last two years has enabled our global scientific community to gain a deeper knowledge about this new virus.
- We have learned more about how COVID-19 is transmitted and the body's response to infection. We can now detect, diagnose, and treat COVID-19 more effectively. We also have vaccines that help protect us, especially against the virus' most serious outcomes.
- With all that has happened and all that we have learned over the last two years – there is much we have accomplished and perhaps even more to reflect upon.
- COVID-19 is still with us, and COVID-19 will continue to be with us for the foreseeable future.
- But there are reasons for cautious optimism and reasons why many jurisdictions are taking steps to loosen COVID-19 restrictions.
- For our part, we have passed the Omicron peak here in Ontario and in Toronto. And key COVID-19 severity indicators continue to improve.
- We've seen the number of daily hospitalizations and ICU admissions decline significantly from the highs in these indicators reached in early January.
- We also have tools and knowledge to protect us against COVID-19 and we can take steps to lessen our own personal and collective risk.
- There is a global effort to continue to deepen our knowledge about the virus, to share knowledge, to quickly respond, and to develop additional treatments and interventions.
- We have effective COVID-19 treatments and vaccines that are protecting us against the worst possible outcomes.

- We know that masking can help stop the spread of COVID-19. We know that when you're feeling ill – you reduce the likelihood of spread when you stay home.
- With all the tools that we personally and collectively have at our disposal – and given our current local epidemiology – we can gradually loosen restrictions that, just a few short weeks ago, were so necessary.
- This doesn't mean that COVID is over. But now is the time to begin to live more fulsome lives *with* COVID. We can begin restore aspects of our lives that were necessary to change to keep ourselves and each other safe.
- This news, for some, is a welcomed relief. And this news, for others, is very difficult to take – especially for those who are at higher risk like seniors or immunocompromised individuals – as they will need to continue to practice more strict personal protective measures.
- Still, we need to find a way to gradually restore activities that contribute to our overall health and well-being.
- As with so many other stages of the pandemic, the choices that we make in our day-to-day lives do depend on our personal circumstances. As restrictions lift, people will make different choices based on what is right for them.
- For Toronto Public Health's part, we will continue to monitor COVID-19 and communicate with you – especially about what we are seeing in terms of virus transmission here in Toronto.
- We still cannot underestimate the nature of this virus and how it can evolve.
- And we aren't alone in this global effort to engage in careful scientific observation that will continue to inform our decision making and response.
- We will provide the best possible guidance on how to keep yourselves, your households, and our community healthy and safe.

- We will continue to provide public health programs and responses – including our current hyper-local COVID-19 vaccination program – that protect and promote the health of all Toronto residents.
- Toronto residents have responded in extraordinary ways over the last two years. Though change can be hard, with patience and understanding for each other, we will adjust and adapt – together.

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