



Update on COVID-19

Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health

April 4, 2022 at 10:00 a.m.

Union Station

- Thank you Mayor Tory, and good morning everyone.
- We are several weeks out since the province loosened COVID-19 restrictions, and with many more opportunities for people to mix, we are seeing an anticipated increase in COVID-19 activity in Toronto.
- Through our careful monitoring, it is clear that our local indicators of COVID-19 activity are reflecting this trend: including our wastewater surveillance, case counts, and institutional outbreaks.
- We are not post-pandemic – no matter how tired we may be and no matter how much we wish that it were so.
- We are, however, in a very different place – a better place – than we were.
- Two years ago, our main tools for self-protection included physical distancing, socializing outdoors and mask use.
- Fast forward one year later and we had safe and effective vaccines to administer, followed by the launch of our immunization clinics last March.
- As of last week, as you've just heard the Mayor say, almost 90 per cent of Toronto residents aged 12 and older have had two doses of the vaccine.
- And today, we now have a number of safe and effective treatments for COVID-19 compared to where we were say two years ago, or even one year ago — our ability to detect, safeguard against, manage, and treat COVID-19 has been changed significantly. And thanks to modern science and global cooperation, this continues to grow.

- We should expect that, from time to time, we are going to have to adjust our behaviour – to use all of the layers of self-protection that we have at our disposal – to respond appropriately to the COVID-19 activity in our communities. This is one of those times.
- What's more, what I have seen is that Torontonians can and have used these tools to great effect.
- We have proven again and again what we can do together, and it is this collective power that will serve us well as we navigate this current wave and any future waves.
- Now, in the midst of an anticipated increase in COVID-19 activity, we have the knowledge to effectively reduce our risk.
- There is much that rests in our collective and individual control.
- There are good data, internationally, nationally and locally, showing clearly that if you have three doses of COVID-19 vaccine, your risk of severe outcomes from a COVID-19 infection is significantly reduced.
- In Ontario, data for cases 18 years of age and older, reported between February 17 and March 18, show that for those with one or fewer doses of COVID-19 vaccine, the rate of hospitalization was two and a half times higher – and the rate of ICU admission was almost five times higher – than individuals with three doses or more.
- And we've observed similar outcomes in Toronto particularly for those 60 years of age and older. We've seen the risk of hospitalization amongst unvaccinated individuals is three times higher and the risk of ICU admission is five times that for those with three doses or more.
- So if you are eligible for a third dose and you have not yet gotten that, please get it now. If you're not up to date on your vaccine, please go get your next dose now. This is especially important for individuals who are older and have a weakened immune system.

- If you know someone without a third dose or not up to date with their vaccinations, help them get their next dose. We have more options than ever to receive a COVID-19 vaccine – as you've just heard the Mayor say. Whether it's at our immunization clinics – like the one we're at here today, through primary care and at more than 525 pharmacies across the City.
- If you're sick or have COVID-19 symptoms – no matter how mild – please stay home and isolate as best you can to help reduce the spread of infection.
- And if you have COVID and are at higher risk, you may be eligible to receive COVID-19 treatment. Please call your doctor, or Telehealth to find out more.
- It's true that individuals are no longer mandated to wear a mask in many settings. But you can choose to wear one, to continue to wear one, and I encourage you to do so. Wear the best quality mask that you have access to, and ensure that it fits well.
- Wearing a mask is a simple thing that we can all do – especially if you are older, have older people in your life, have a serious health condition, or simply indoors with people you don't know.
- I hear and I know that many are frustrated. I know that many are tired. I'm tired too, we all are. The reality is that we can and we must continue to do our part and to do what is best for the health of our entire community.
- No single intervention on its own is perfect at preventing COVID-19 spread. Through each choice and each layer of protection that we employ – we incrementally decrease our risk. Our most effective strategy is to use multiple layers of prevention.
- There isn't an all-or-nothing choice that's in front of us when it comes to continuing to protect yourself and each other.
- We have the tools and the knowledge to blunt COVID-19 activity and spread.

- It is our collective action – the series of all of our choices – about the things that are in our control that will have an impact.
- Together, we yield a lot of power.
- We have supported each other through this pandemic for two years – and continue to do so with kindness and with caring. And together, we have come so far.
- We've used the knowledge and tools we have acquired – masking, staying home when sick – and now safe and effective treatment for those at higher risk – as layers of protection for ourselves and for those around us.
- Along with our vaccination partners, we've administered almost 7 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine in the last 15 months — the largest vaccine campaign in the history of this City. Something that I myself was not sure was even possible for us to do.
- As the Mayor just said, Toronto is a world leader amongst big cities when it comes to the proportion of our population that is vaccinated. And Toronto residents continue to roll up their sleeves.
- So let's continue, let's continue to do what no one thought could be done, demonstrating to the world our caring, our deep commitment to each other and our resilience as a city.