

Update on COVID-19
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
May 9, 2022 at 10:15 a.m.
Nathan Phillips Square
100 Queen St. W.

- Thank you Mayor Tory and good morning.
- It is incredible to realize – as the Mr. Mayor just said– that Toronto has been under an emergency order for 777 days.
- Like the Mayor, I will never forget the hard work, resilience, perseverance and dedication of the staff, volunteers, ambassadors, and dozens and dozens of partners who have helped to respond – and those that continue to respond -- to this once-in-a-lifetime public health crisis.
- I am eternally grateful for – and truly in awe of – the resilience of Toronto residents.
- Today is the beginning of National Nursing week and with this in mind, I do want to acknowledge the crucial work of nurses in all of our communities and on the front lines of this pandemic.
- Thank you to the more than 1,300 public health nurses and registered practical nurses at Toronto Public Health who show up every day to protect and promote the health of Toronto residents: as people giving care, as advocates, advisors, immunizers, case managers and in the many, many role that they play. Thank you to all of you.
- Today, I'm also happy to share some encouraging news with Toronto in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- I'm happy to report that, this week, Toronto's COVID-19 indicators are either decreasing, or holding stable.

- While Toronto Public Health continues to keep a close eye on both institutional outbreaks and the severe outcomes of COVID-19 infections across the City, I'm encouraged to see signs of improvement in the indicators related to Toronto's health system capacity and in our weekly case rates, percent positivity and wastewater signals.
- These are positive signs that, coupled with this warmer weather, give us hope that COVID-19 activity in the city will continue to decrease.
- And so I encourage Toronto residents to take advantage of these warmer temperatures and enjoy the sunshine, open windows and take your social gatherings outdoors as much as possible.
- That being said, as the Mayor just said as well, this isn't a signal that we can let down our guard when it comes to COVID-19 – nor is it time to let go on efforts to get Torontonians their next dose of vaccine.
- In fact, now is the time for every resident to ensure that they are up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations.
- There is emerging evidence of increases in COVID-19 reinfection from peer jurisdictions – like the United States, the United Kingdom and South Africa – that are currently experiencing an increase in Omicron sub-variants and sub-lineages in recent weeks.
- The evidence suggests that natural protection provided from a previous COVID-19 infection may be evaded by Omicron.
- Toronto Public Health is still collecting and analyzing our local data on this issue, but it appears there has been an increase in the proportion of cases that are reinfections in 2022.
- So – if you have experienced a COVID-19 infection during the Omicron wave - and many have – you should not rely on protection from that previous infection alone against contracting COVID-19 in the future.

- And – the risk of reinfection to people who are unvaccinated has likely increased because of the Omicron sub-variants.
- The good news is that vaccination has been shown to enhance protection against COVID-19 even after an infection. This is especially true when you are up to date with your booster doses.
- And for our part, Toronto Public Health will continue to pull out all the stops when it comes to getting Toronto residents their next dose of COVID-19 vaccine.
- As the Mayor indicated over the last month, Toronto Public Health and our partners have continued to bring COVID-19 vaccines to where Toronto lives, works, studies and plays.
- We held 514 mobile vaccination clinic opportunities over the month of April, which delivered more than 10,100 doses of COVID-19 vaccine.
- Nearly 3,400 doses were delivered through the Vax and Ride campaign at TTC stations. And this is in addition to the more than 22,000 doses delivered at the City's five fixed-site immunization clinics.
- As you've heard the Mayor say, in May, we're bringing mobile clinics to farmers' markets, Doors Open Toronto, and in buildings that are accessible to Toronto's senior residents.
- Our Vaccine Engagement Teams and Vaccine Ambassadors are essential components to the success of our mobile vaccine efforts.
- Vaccine Engagement Teams operate through 17 geographic and population-based groups made up of over 200 health, community and faith-based organizations.

- These teams have mobilized more than 600 Community Ambassadors across Toronto to increase vaccine confidence and access. The Vaccine Engagement program was formed to meet extraordinary circumstances in the midst of the pandemic to ensure that real, historical and systemic barriers to vaccination are addressed.
- Given the success of the Vaccine Engagement Teams, I'm recommending at next week's Board of Health meeting, that the program be extended until at least the end of December 2022, and I do appreciate the support that Mayor Tory has expressed.
- We want to continue to ensure that Toronto residents have access to vaccines and the information they need to make informed decisions about their health and the health of their families.
- I know that we all want this pandemic to be over. While today there are many reasons for hope, the pandemic does continue and COVID-19 is still circulating in our communities.
- We still need to be vigilant and ensure that we are doing all that we can to protect one another.
- Vaccination is an important part of that protection --- as is continued mask wearing when indoors, outside of your home or in crowded spaces, and getting outside, bringing your social interaction outside whenever possible.
- Our City has come together in extraordinary ways over the last couple of years. And I, like the Mayor, am hopeful for the future.
- If we can see each other through a global pandemic, think of all that we can achieve together as we continue to work together to build for a healthier City.