

Dear East Toronto principals and school communities,

I hope you are keeping safe and well. My name is Dr. Janine McCreedy and I am an infectious diseases physician at Michael Garron Hospital (MGH).

Many of you have come to know myself and MGH as a trusted source for COVID-19 information and infection prevention and control (IPAC) guidance during the pandemic. For those I haven't yet met, it's nice to meet you and I look forward to partnering with you to ensure safe in-person learning!

As we enter the start of another school year amid the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to reach out to share some important information about masking, testing and vaccines, and how MGH will be supporting schools in facilitating safe in-person learning this year.

The recommendations outlined below are based on guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), as well as evidence-based studies, real-world data and measures that are proven effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

I encourage you to share this information with your school communities. Some of this information is also available on the [MGH website](#).

Recommendations for masking



Although the province is no longer mandating masking in many settings, including schools, we encourage all school staff, students and families to continue wearing masks at school and in other indoor public settings.

Masking is one of our strongest tools in preventing the spread of COVID-19. They offer an extra layer of protection against COVID-19 and other viruses like the flu, which will be circulating alongside COVID-19 during fall and winter.

Wearing a well-fitted, quality mask also reduces the risk of children missing school and having their learning disrupted due to illness.

Recommendations for self-isolation for individuals who have symptoms or test positive for COVID-19

As you may be aware, the province has removed the five-day isolation rule for individuals with a confirmed COVID-19 infection. **Despite this, the virus has not changed and individuals can still spread COVID-19 to others for 10 days starting from the first day of symptoms.**

Toronto Public Health currently recommends that if you have **any** cold or flu symptoms, you should self-isolate and stay at home until your fever, if you have one, is resolved and your symptoms have improved for at least 24 hours (48 hours for gastrointestinal symptoms).

If you have cold and flu symptoms, you should do the following for a total of 10 days starting from the day you began experiencing symptoms or starting the day of your positive COVID-19 test (whichever was earlier):

- Continue to wear a well-fitted mask in all indoor public settings (including schools and childcare centres, unless you are under two years old)
- Avoid non-essential activities where mask removal is necessary (e.g. dining out, playing a wind instrument, high-contact sports where masks cannot be safely worn)
- Avoid seeing anyone who is immunocompromised or at higher risk of illness (e.g. seniors)
- Avoid non-essential visits to highest risk settings such as hospitals and long-term care homes

The last few years have been very challenging and we all want to minimize days of missed school. Staying home when you are sick and not returning until symptoms have resolved will help prevent the spread of infections in classrooms.

COVID-19 vaccines for adults, youth and children



We encourage all school staff, students and families to get as many doses of the COVID-19 vaccine as they are eligible for as soon as possible.

Getting vaccinated and staying up-to-date on vaccinations greatly reduces the risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19, as well as complications from the virus, therefore helping to protect your loved ones and community.

If you recently had COVID-19 and already have two or more doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, you should wait three to six months after you recover to get the next booster dose you are eligible for. If you recently had COVID-19 and have no doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, you should wait two months after you recover to get your first dose.

Please see a summary of current eligibility, as determined by the Ontario government, below. Visit the [Ontario government's website](#) to see full eligibility details.

Eligible for first doses	Eligible for first, second and booster doses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children aged six months to under 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children aged 5-11 • Youth aged 12-17 • Adults aged 18+

Where to get your COVID-19 vaccine

- **Clinics near you:** If you are eligible for a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and would like to be vaccinated, please make an appointment at a clinic near you using the [provincial booking system online](#) or by calling 1-833-943-3900.
- **Toronto Public Health clinics including Thorncliffe Park Community Hub:** You can get vaccinated by appointment and walk-in at [sites operated by public health units like Toronto Public Health](#), including Thorncliffe Park Community Hub (45 Overlea Blvd.).

- **Select paediatricians, family doctors and [pharmacies](#):** Please contact your primary care provider or local pharmacy for more information.
 - South East Toronto Family Health Team (SETFHT) at 840 Coxwell Ave. (across the street from MGH) is also hosting vaccine clinics. Please see setfht.on.ca for more information.

Have questions or concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine?

If you have questions about the COVID-19 vaccine for infants and children, I encourage you to:

- Speak with your healthcare provider
- Call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900
- Book a phone appointment with [SickKids' COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service](#) where you can speak with a registered nurse
- Look at science-based resources (see below for helpful examples)
- Attend an online information session about the COVID-19 vaccine (see below for more information)

Where to get a COVID-19 test and treatment



If you or a member of your classroom or household are at [higher risk of severe illness or complications from COVID-19](#) and are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or think you have been exposed to COVID-19, we encourage you to get a PCR test at the [MGH Clinical Assessment Centre](#) or one of our [COVID-19 Outreach Centres](#) in East Toronto.

These sites offer PCR tests by walk-in and appointment. They also offer assessments and prescriptions for COVID-19 treatment, including the Paxlovid pill, for individuals who are at higher risk of hospitalization from COVID-19.

In addition, MGH will continue to distribute take-home COVID-19 PCR test kits to individuals at higher risk of COVID-19. This includes staff, children and families at schools and childcare centres that have historically higher positivity rates of COVID-19 and lower vaccination rates.

For schools with these kits, we encourage you to distribute them to staff, students and families who are at higher risk of severe illness or complications from COVID-19. This includes individuals who are older and/or immunocompromised. If your school needs more COVID-19 PCR test kits, please e-mail mghschoolsupport@tehn.ca.

Resources about COVID-19 and vaccines

Online Information Sessions about COVID-19 Vaccine for Children Aged 6 Months to Under 5 Years

- **What:** Toronto Public Health invites parents and guardians to information sessions on the COVID-19 vaccine for infants and children. Each session includes a Q&A period and will help you make an informed decision about getting your children vaccinated.
- **When:**

- Monday, September 12 from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- Wednesday September 14 from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- **Where:** [Download and view Toronto Public Health flyers](#) for instructions on how to join the information sessions online or by phone.

Please note: If you are a principal of a school in a neighbourhood with historically higher positivity rates of COVID-19 and lower vaccination rates, I would also be happy to join a parent council meeting, virtual town hall or Q&A to answer questions about the COVID-19 vaccine from your school community. Please e-mail mghschoolsupport@tehn.ca if you are interested.

COVID-19 Vaccine Resources for Children Aged 6 Months to Under 5 Years

- [COVID-19 vaccine for children 6 months to under 5 years old](#) (Toronto Public Health)
- [What are the reasons to vaccinate my young child against COVID-19 \(6 months to 5 years old\)?](#) (University of Waterloo)
- [Frequently asked questions: Timing of COVID-19 vaccines for young children \(aged 6 months to 5 years\)](#) (University of Waterloo)
- [COVID-19 vaccine for children and youth](#) (Canadian Paediatric Society)
- [Max the Vax: Learn all about the COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 6 months to 11](#) (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies)
- [Vaccine for children: COVID-19](#) (Government of Canada)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service](#) (SickKids)

COVID-19 Vaccine Resources for Children Aged 5 to 11

- [Get the facts: Vaccinating children against COVID-19](#) (Government of Canada)
- [Making vaccines easier for your Child](#) (Toronto Public Health)

General Vaccine Resources for Infants (not specifically about COVID-19)

- [Making vaccines easier for your baby](#) (Toronto Public Health)
- [Reduce the pain of vaccination in children under 3 years](#) (SickKids, Immunize Canada and Help Eliminate Pain)

If you can't reach your family doctor or need emergency care

If you or your child have cold and flu symptoms and are unable to reach your family doctor (or if you do not have a family doctor), the doctors at our [COVID-19 Outreach Centres](#) in East Toronto can help. They can assess you or your child and make recommendations for next steps, including prescriptions if needed.

Our COVID-19 Outreach Centre in Taylor-Massey also offers mental health counselling by appointment for adults, youth and children. Parent and guardian consent is needed for anyone aged 12 and under. [Learn more about this service, including how to book an appointment.](#)



If you or your child are experiencing an urgent but non-life threatening health issue, I encourage you to book a same-day online appointment using MGH's [Virtual Emergency Department \(ED\)](#).

If you need to come to our ED in-person, please come prepared by reading the [information available here](#).

MGH's ED also has a Child and Youth Emergency Zone, a family-friendly space within the ED that operates during peak hours. [Learn more about MGH's Child and Youth Emergency Zone.](#)

Please note: You may have heard there is a shortage of some children's Tylenol products, including liquid Tylenol, due to supply chain issues. However, please be assured many community pharmacies continue to have sufficient supplies of these over-the-counter products. You and your child do not need a prescription to access these products.

If you need a children's Tylenol product and do not see it on the shelf of your local pharmacy, we encourage you to speak with the pharmacist on-site. If the over-the-counter medication you are looking for is not available, the pharmacist will be able to conduct an assessment to make alternative recommendations.

Information about other vaccines

Keeping up on all routine vaccines is important. This includes vaccines in infancy and early childhood (ages four to six) and in grade 7. This also includes annual flu vaccines.

If your child has missed regular vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, please contact your family doctor or other healthcare provider as soon as possible.

Vaccinations for children aged four to six are especially important to protect against a number of infections and outbreaks we are seeing in different parts of the world, including polio, measles and chicken pox.

Students in grades 7 to 12 can book vaccination appointments for Hepatitis B, HPV and Meningococcal vaccines at clinics run by Toronto Public Health, including Thorncliffe Park Community Hub (45 Overlea Blvd.). To book an appointment, [visit Toronto Public Health's website](#) and click "School Immunization Program Clinics". Select the location that is closest to you.

If you have a child in this age group who has missed any routine vaccines, I encourage you to get them vaccinated as soon as possible. This helps protect them against these viruses.

In addition, Toronto Public Health is currently investigating a confirmed outbreak of invasive Meningococcal disease. The Meningococcal quadrivalent vaccine administered at the Toronto Public Health clinics includes coverage for this strain of serogroup C Meningococcal disease.

Thank you for your important work in ensuring safe in-person learning for staff, children and families in our community, which is so vital for children's health, happiness and well-being.

Please let me know if I can be of further help to you and your school community this year. I look forward to continuing our work together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janine McCready
Infectious Diseases Physician
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