

COVID-19 Information and Tips

June 10, 2022

The sixth wave

Some doctors noted the start of the sixth wave on March 29, 2022.* Shortly after, Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table shared modelling data that confirmed that we are in the sixth wave.* This modelling data concluded that the sixth wave has been driven by the highly contagious BA.2 subvariant, immunity from the first and second dose gradually decreasing, and public health measures being lifted.*

The Omicron Variant and its Sub-Variants

Omicron has become the dominant variant in the world, replacing the Delta variant.* The Omicron variant spreads even more easily than the Delta variant.*

The more a virus spreads, the more it mutates. This is why the Omicron variant also has many other sub-variants within it. The most important sub-variant to know is BA.2, which also has its own sub-variants.

According to data from COVID-19 cases between May 8 to May 14, BA.2 made up 58.3% of all COVID-19 cases and its sub-variants made up the other 36% of cases.* Together, that's 94.3% of all severe COVID-19 cases in Ontario that week!

The Omicron Variant and its The XE Recombinant Variant

A recombinant variant is a new type of variant that is a combination of two related viruses (or strains/variants/sub-variants of the same virus).*

Canada's chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam says the new variant is a combination of genetic material from Omicron and the BA.2 variant and transmission within the country would not be a surprise.*

"We do expect that to happen because there is a lot of transmission of this virus all over the world," she says. "We're watching that one very carefully."*

News about the Omicron XE variant hasn't been updated since April 2022. However, at the time of writing, there are 6 confirmed cases in Canada and none in Ontario.*

The new variant is being described as the most transmissible strain so far, estimating that it is 10% more infectious than BA.2.* However, it does not appear to result in more serious illness.*

Changes to counting cases & getting tested

Public health units are no longer required to report the daily case counts to Public Health Ontario, so the reported number of cases is likely much lower than the actual number of cases. Also, as of December 31, 2021, Ontario has only been providing PCR tests to high-risk individuals who are also showing symptoms.

Since fewer people are able to get PCR tests, at-home rapid antigen tests have become essential to help people know when to isolate.* A Statistics Canada survey from April 2022 found that nearly 2 in 5 Canadians experienced difficulties in trying to get one.*

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) says that as of May 18, it has distributed more than 369 million rapid tests this year.* PHAC says that it plans to keep distributing COVID-19 rapid tests to provinces and territories until at least the end of 2022, but it will reassess the situation and may stop providing rapid tests afterwards.* PHAC will instead keep these tests in a “strategic reserve” for the future.*

The more accurate indicators of the current COVID-19 situation are:

- the number of people in hospital with COVID-19
- the number of COVID-19 patients in Intensive Care Units (ICU)
- COVID-19 wastewater signal, which looks at the “103 wastewater treatment plants, pumping stations and sewer sheds in the 34 public health units.”* Note that there is a 5 to 7-day lag between the detection of COVID-19 in the wastewater and the diagnosis and reporting of COVID-19 cases.*

Removing mask mandates and vaccine certificates

Another new feature of the sixth wave is the removal of mask mandates and vaccine certificates. Speaking on removing mask mandates, Dr. Robert Cushman said, “Many of us [doctors] thought it was premature. With the Omicron variant out there and what we’re seeing with waste water... even hospitalizations, we have concerns.”*

Click [here](#) to read more about the removal of mask mandates. Ever since the announcement that COVID-19 health precautions will be lifted, the term “layers of protection” has been used a lot. Click [here](#) to read more about what that means!

Get your booster shots to strengthen your immune response!

For many people, their first and second booster doses will be their third and fourth dose, but if you are moderately or severely immunocompromised, the second booster dose could be your fifth dose.* Click [here](#) to read the latest information about who is eligible for any of these doses.

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September 7, 2021

The fourth wave

Right now, we are in the fourth wave. It's normal for pandemics to have many phases, or "waves", where the number of cases increases and decreases multiple times.

We aren't in lockdown, but it's a possibility for the future as some provinces' hospitals are still overwhelmed from the pandemic's previous waves.* Preventing hospitals from getting overwhelmed is a key factor in preventing lockdowns.*

In the fourth wave, almost everyone still has to wear a mask. Click [here](#) to read about why it is required and which groups do not have to follow this rule.

The Delta variant

Another key feature of the fourth wave is the Delta variant. The Delta variant is believed to account for more than 90% of all new COVID-19 cases in Ontario.* Currently, Ontario has over 10,500 confirmed cases of this variant.* It is also the most dominant variant worldwide.***

We know that the Delta variant's genetic structure is unique, so it spreads more easily than other variants and the original COVID-19 virus. Two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine offer strong protection against this variant, but you can still get infected by it after being fully vaccinated.* Click [here](#) for more information about the Delta variant.

Breakthrough cases

It's possible for fully vaccinated people to get infected with COVID-19.* This is called a "breakthrough" case because the virus "broke through" or got past the vaccine's immune defense. Click [here](#) to read more about breakthrough cases.

Those who are most likely to be infected after being fully vaccinated are the same people who are in the "high risk" category of getting COVID-19. Click [here](#) to see the government's list of "high risk" people.

Availability of vaccines

Currently, everyone who is 12 years old and older is able to get vaccinated. Health experts encourage everyone to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Click [here](#) to book your first or second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Mixing vaccines

Based on real world data, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has consistently stated that mixing doses of mRNA vaccines is safe and effective.* On top of that, the benefits of getting vaccinated outweigh the possible health risks of mixing vaccines.* Click [here](#) to read more about mixing vaccines.

Real world data shows that vaccines are considered generally safe for anyone who does not have any contraindications. “Contraindications” are any conditions that could put your health at risk during vaccination.

If you have any concerns about how mixing vaccines might interact with your specific disability, I strongly recommend that you speak with your healthcare provider about it. If you don't have a family doctor, you can call 1-866-797-0000 to discuss your situation with a Registered Nurse at Telehealth Ontario. The phone call is confidential and free.

Third doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, also known as “booster shots”

For the general population, two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine will give them strong protection against catching COVID-19 and its variants, as well as suffering from severe symptoms.* Getting two doses of the vaccine is the best protection against the Delta variant.*

But two doses might not be enough for some specific groups of people, and these people qualify for a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Click [here](#) to see who is eligible for a third dose.

Vaccine certificates and proof of vaccination

Starting September 22, everyone in Ontario will need to be fully vaccinated and show proof of vaccination as well as proof of identity to access certain indoor public spaces. This includes: restaurants, movie theatres, gyms, casinos, concert halls, and other businesses.*

Everyone who has been vaccinated is encouraged to download their vaccine receipt to use while the government finishes developing the vaccine certificate. Click [here](#) to download your vaccine receipt.

The government has answered some Frequently Asked Questions, or FAQs about vaccine certificates. Click [here](#) to read the original document, and click [here](#) to read the same information in plain language.

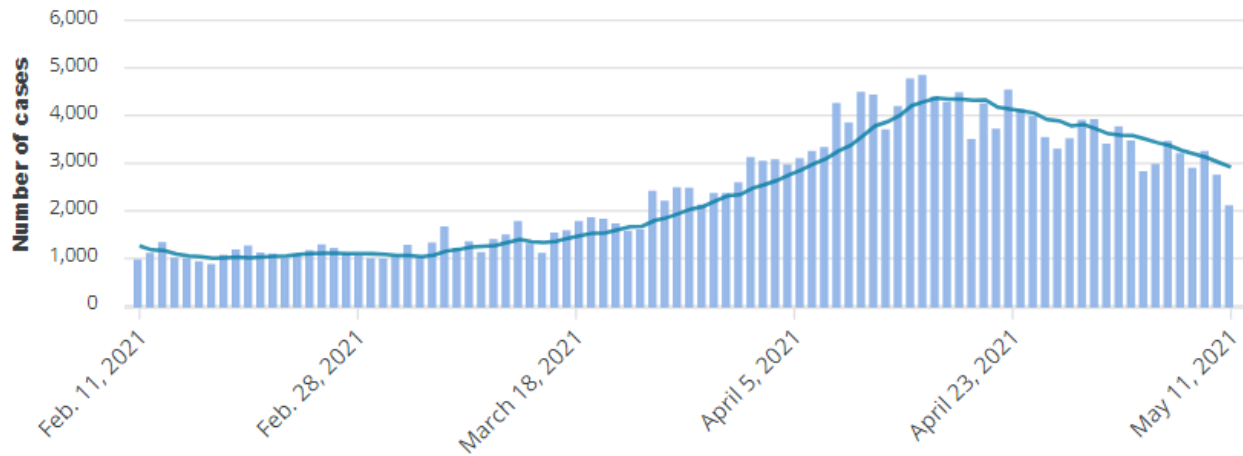
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May 11, 2021

What stage of the pandemic are we in?

The Covid -19 pandemic began with Ontario seeing the first wave of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. Historically pandemics see many phases, or “waves” meaning numbers will increase and decrease multiple times before the last phase in which we will see the pandemic contained with the development and distribution of successful vaccines.

The second wave began in September 2020, and we are now in the third wave, and as some experts agree, the middle of the pandemic. Over time, the Covid-19 virus has mutated into several variants originating in other countries such as the B.1.17 variant (United Kingdom), B.1.351 variant (South Africa), and P.1 variant (Brazil).



Source: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/data>

As you can see on this graph, displaying the third wave, positive Covid cases peaked towards the end of April 2021, and have been slowly declining since then.

Availability of vaccines and effectiveness

Vaccines are becoming more and more available to the public as the supply grows, with priority being given to designated hot spots. As of today (May 11, 2021), People with at-risk conditions in Ontario will be eligible to book their Covid-19 vaccine appointment. The province says that includes people with dementia, diabetes and sickle cell disease. Beginning Thursday, the province says that anyone over the age of 40 will be able to book their vaccine.

Upon receiving a vaccine, a person’s immunity grows over time. In a recent study, it has shown the vaccines to be very effective in combating Covid-19. This study showed that out

of 0.06% of people who got infected with Covid-19, 0.67% of the people contracted Covid-19 within fourteen days of receiving the vaccine. This is very encouraging. All vaccines have provided excellent protection of all variants so far.

Current Stay at Home Order

Effective April 17th, 2021, Ontario was issued a stay at home order in an effort to stop the spread of Covid-19. The guidelines for our current stay at home order are as follows;

- Prohibit all outdoor social gatherings and organized public events, except for with members of the same household or one other person from outside that household who lives alone or a caregiver for any member of the household;
- Close all non-essential workplaces in the construction sector;
- Reduce capacity limits to 25 per cent in all retail settings where in-store shopping is permitted. -This includes supermarkets, grocery stores, convenience stores, indoor farmers' markets, other stores that primarily sell food and pharmacies; and,
- Close all outdoor recreational amenities, such as golf courses, basketball courts, soccer fields, and playgrounds with limited exceptions.
- In addition, effective Monday, April 19, 2021 at 12:01 a.m., the government is limiting the capacity of weddings, funerals, and religious services, rites or ceremonies to 10 people indoors or outdoors. Social gatherings associated with these services such as receptions are prohibited, except for with members of the same household or one other person from outside that household who lives alone. Drive-in services will be permitted.

The current stay at home order is expected to end on May 20th, 2021, however, most experts predict that that will be extended at least by two weeks.

Source: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/61192/ontario-strengthens-enforcement-of-stay-at-home-order>

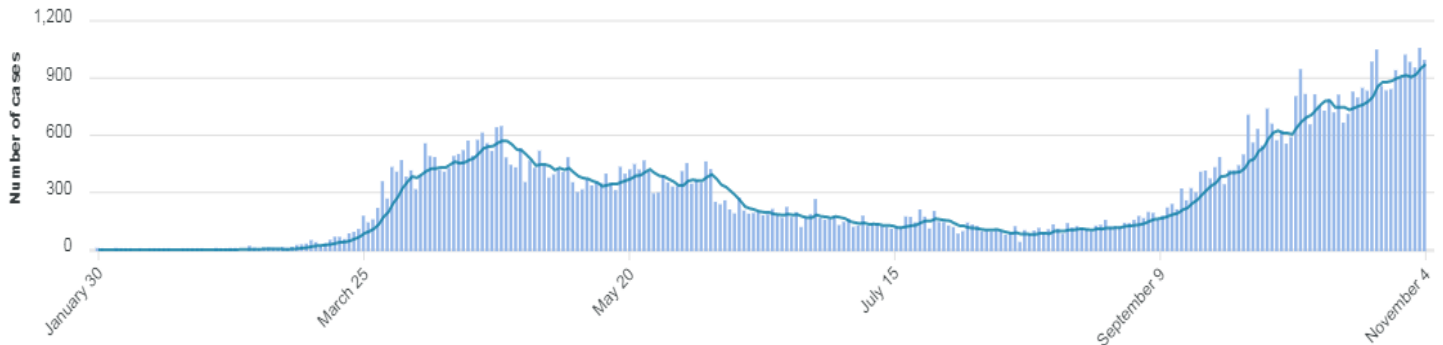
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Updated: November 13, 2020

What stage of the pandemic are we currently in?

The metaphor of waves on the sea has been used to describe the rise and fall in the number of cases of COVID-19 in the province and in the country. The “wave” is a term used to highlight the overall shape of an epidemic curve in terms of the number of new cases per day. Because it is the overall shape that gets looked at, there is no precise number of daily cases that determine when a wave ends and a new one begins.

Ontario, along with the rest of Canada, experienced the first wave of the pandemic in the spring. There was a decline in reported daily cases over the summer months, which makes a dip in the graph. Since the beginning of September, the trend of COVID-19 cases has been steadily increasing.



Source: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/data>

As can be seen on this graph of the daily reported COVID-19 cases in Ontario, the province is currently in its second wave. Currently, our 7-day average of new COVID-19 cases in the province is the highest that it has ever been, and therefore we are experiencing more transmission of the virus in this second wave than was experienced in the first wave.

What are targeted regional lockdowns?

Targeted regional lockdowns are based on outbreak areas of a city or province. Within the province, there are regions of Ontario that are reporting high daily case counts of COVID-19, as well as high transmission rates and high positivity rates. The province’s four main hotspots have consistently been the regions of Toronto, Peel, York and Ottawa. These regions have more restrictions on businesses put in place in order to limit transmission of the virus

According to the colour-coded framework for COVID-19 restrictions that was recently put out by the provincial government, a “red level” given to a region of the province means that the region would be moved back into a modified Stage 2. A positivity rate of more than 10 percent, or a weekly incident rate of more than 100 infections per 100, 000 people is needed in order for a region to be declared in the red zone. Although this is the highest level of restrictions that a region can have before going into a

lockdown, municipal governments are able to impose greater restrictions than the ones laid out in the provincial framework.

How should I prepare for flu season?

It has been highly recommended by health officials to get your flu shot this year. This is due to rising COVID-19 cases, and the possibility that we could see a 'twindemic' of both the flu and COVID-19. This potential twindemic could overwhelm the healthcare system.

Another concern is that COVID-19 and influenza have very similar symptoms. If a person is presenting symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath, it could be either illness. If you've had your flu shot and are experiencing these symptoms, it is most likely COVID-19. Therefore, getting the flu shot limits this confusion and potential worry.

Flu shots are available in a variety of locations, including participating pharmacies (locations of Rexall and Shoppers Drug Mart), family doctors, and some public health clinics.

What is an emergency order?

Governments across Canada have the ability to take extraordinary measures and instill new and temporary laws once government officials are of the opinion that certain emergency conditions have arisen. In this circumstance, the emergency condition came in the form of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. Usually a law requires that a declaration of Emergency be made before the government can exercise any such powers.

Examples of current emergency orders:

- Limiting employment to a single Retirement Home/Long Term Care
- Limiting the number of persons allowed to gather in one place
- Prohibiting unfair pricing on essential goods
- Closure of outdoor recreational activities
- Special rules regarding temporary pandemic pay

Why does the emergency order keep getting extended?

In order to maintain the health and well-being of the citizens of Ontario, Premier Doug Ford has extended existing emergency orders until July 15th, 2020. As long as there continues to be cases of COVID-19 in Ontario, there is potential for the emergency orders to continue being extended even further into the year. The emergency orders are in place to ensure that the public are adhering to all health and safety measures required to avoid a spike in cases as well as to avoid a possible second wave of the virus.

Mandatory use of masks/face coverings in public indoor setting

To protect the health and safety of our communities, Toronto City Council voted in favour of requiring masks or face coverings in all enclosed public spaces as of July 7 to help stop the spread of COVID-19. The Medical Officer of Health recommended to City Council to use its authority to legislate for the protection North Yorkers for Disabled Persons Inc.

Updated November 13, 2020

of health, safety and well-being of persons in Toronto to enact a temporary bylaw requiring businesses and facilities to have a policy that ensures masks or face coverings are worn by the public in the enclosed spaces under their control to prevent a resurgence of COVID-19 cases.

Mandatory use of masks/face coverings on the TTC

As of July 2nd, 2020, masks/face coverings have become mandatory to use while accessing TTC services. Exemptions will be made for children under two years of age and for those who have medical considerations or are unable to put on or take off a face covering. Not wearing a mask can carry a fine of \$195 however the TTC will be focusing more on educating their customers rather than implementing charges. The TTC will be handing out 1 million non-medical masks to those who need one. ^[1]_[SEP]

Why are congregate living settings and Long-Term Care (LTC) slower to reopen?

As we navigate the second stage of re-opening businesses in Ontario, some LTC and congregate settings are staying behind by following a stage one philosophy. As the future of COVID-19 is unknown and more and more people are beginning to gather and utilize businesses, we must remain vigilant to ensure that the integrity of our health and safety policies remain strong to maintain the well-being of our residents and staff. Vigilance comes in the form of not relaxing on our Infection Prevention and Control policies, keeping the residents at home, and maintaining a strict visitor's policy.

Coronavirus: COVID-19 Information and Tips

Updated May 19, 2020

Here's what we know:

Common symptoms of COVID-19 Include:

- Fever of 37.8°C or greater
- New or worsening cough
- Shortness of breath

Other signs and symptoms of COVID-19 can include:

- Sore throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- New olfactory or taste disorder
- Nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain
- Runny nose, sneezing or congestions (in absence of underlying reason for these symptoms such as allergies, etc.)
- Clinical or radiological evidence of pneumonia

Atypical signs and symptoms of COVID-19 can include:

- Unexplained fatigue
- Delirium
- Unexplained or increased number of falls
- Acute functional decline
- Exacerbation of chronic conditions
- Chills
- Headaches
- Croup
- Conjunctivitis (Pink eye)
- Unexplained tachycardia
- Unexplained hypoxia (even if mild)
- Decrease in blood pressure
- Lethargy
- Multisystem inflammatory vasculitis in children

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to the flu with fever, coughing and shortness of breath being the most common symptoms. It appears to mainly be spread through close person-to-person contact. It may be possible for someone to touch a surface or object with the virus on it and then touch their nose or mouth and become infected, but this is not the main way the virus spreads, according to many reliable sources including the WHO and CDC. In addition to all the normal things you do to stay healthy, the preventive measures are the same as for the flu or other viruses, according to CDC:

1. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol.
2. As the province starts to open up the economy, keep in mind that most stores require patrons to wear a mask. Ensure that you do not touch the front of the mask as this is where the virus would be. See appendix for proper removal of masks.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
4. Ensure you have two weeks' worth of supplies on hand such as:
 - Incontinence supplies (Wipes, briefs, etc.)
 - Masks
 - Gloves
 - Hand sanitizer
 - Groceries
 - Household cleaners and disinfectant products
5. Stock up your freezer with healthy pre-made meals.
6. Have a minimum of 2 weeks' worth of medication available to you.
7. Some doctors are starting to see more patients in person with strict safety protocols in place. If you absolutely need to visit your doctor, call ahead to ensure it is safe to do so and follow all directions from the medical team such as how early to arrive.
8. Cover your cough or sneeze in the sleeve of your elbow or with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash immediately.
9. Carry disinfectant and infection prevention products with you if you are in the community such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and a mask.
10. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or disinfectant wipe. ***For example, your cell phone, door knobs, light switches, water kettle/coffee maker, TV remote, handles on mobility devices, car steering wheel and gear shifts, banisters, toilet flusher, computer keyboard and mouse, table edges, medication bottles, etc.***

11. Monitor yourself for unusual health symptoms. Stay home if you are sick and contact your physician or Ontario Public Health if you are experiencing any of the COVID symptoms listed above.
12. Maintain at least a 2 metre distance between yourself and others, especially when out in the community.
13. Continue to be well informed by following the local news as well as daily live updates from each level of Government. (11am= Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, 1pm = Premier Doug Ford)
14. It is normal to feel worried during a crisis, but do not overreact and panic. Talk to people such as friends and family about how you are feeling. It is important to recognize when it might be beneficial to speak with a professional, so do not hesitate to contact your health care provider as they are equipped to refer you to the right person who can help.
15. It is important to remember that we are not out of the woods yet. The virus is still very much as dangerous as it was when this all began, and we must ensure we continue to follow all social distancing and infection prevention measures, especially when out in the community.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding COVID-19 and further steps you can take to protect yourself and those around you from the virus, contact Sarah, our Outreach Communication Facilitator at 416-222-4448 or sarah.nydp@gmail.com.