

Hindsight is 2020 — Reflecting on the COVID-19 Pandemic

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“COVID is still here. It absolutely is. It has not gone away,” said Infectious Diseases Specialist Dr. Isaac Bogoch earlier this month ([source](#)).

“COVID continues to disproportionately impact older Canadians and Canadians that have underlying medical conditions that put them at greater risk for more severe infection,” he added ([source](#)). For people in the Deaf and disabled community, this goes without saying.

And since the pandemic is ongoing, it feels too soon to reflect on it. However, this is the final Friday article, so a reflection seems appropriate.

Many articles reflecting on the pandemic were written earlier this month on the three-year anniversary of COVID being declared a state of emergency in Ontario. Click [here](#) to read the original source of the timeline below, which is one of the most comprehensive timelines. Any additional events that I added have a citation with a different hyperlink.

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While the virus hasn't gone anywhere, Ontario has come a long way since declaring a public emergency in March 2020 ([source](#)). Here's a look back at some of the major milestones of the past three years ([source](#)).

2020

Jan. 25, 2020: A Toronto man in his 50s becomes Canada's first case of COVID-19. He had recently returned from Wuhan, China. He is placed in isolation at Sunnybrook Hospital. Days later, his wife is declared the second case.

Feb. 7, 2020: A plane carrying more than 200 Canadians from Wuhan arrives at Canadian Forces Base Trenton in eastern Ontario. Passengers start a 14-day quarantine.

March 11, 2020: A Utah Jazz player tests positive two days after a game against the Toronto Raptors. This prompted the National Basketball Association (NBA) to suspend its season. Canada had more than 100 recorded cases at this point.

March 12, 2020: The province announces that all publicly-funded schools in Ontario will be closed for two weeks following March Break to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

March 17, 2020: Ontario declares a state of emergency. Premier Doug Ford said, “We are facing an unprecedented time in our history” as he announces that the province is closing schools, recreational programs, theatres, bars, restaurants, and childcare centres. Gatherings of 50 or more people are also banned.

March 18, 2020: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announces that Canada and the U.S. have agreed to temporarily restrict all non-essential travel across the border.

March 30, 2020: Ontario orders the closure of all communal or shared, public or private, outdoor recreational amenities everywhere in the province. The province also extends the Declaration of Emergency and all associated emergency measures, including the closure of non-essential businesses.

March 31, 2020: The province announces that Ontario schools will remain closed until at least May. The city also cancels all major gatherings and events in Toronto through June, including the annual Pride Parade.

April 2, 2020: Toronto residents who do not live together are ordered to stay two metres apart in public spaces under a new bylaw signed by Toronto mayor at the time, John Tory.

April 3, 2020: A shocking projection says that Ontario could see as many as 15,000 deaths from COVID-19 over two years, even if strict measures are implemented. If no measures are put in place, the model estimated that Ontario could see 100,000 deaths. The province extends the list of non-essential businesses that must now close, including some industrial construction projects.

April 22, 2020: Ontario and Quebec call in the military to help out in overwhelmed Long-Term Care homes.

May 11, 2020: Some Ontario stores start offering curbside pickup

May 19, 2020: Many stores reopen in Ontario

May 23, 2020: Thousands of people pack Trinity-Bellwoods Park on a sunny day in Toronto, sparking fears about transmission. The city eventually paints distancing circles on the grass.

May 26, 2020: The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) publish a report on the state of five Ontario Long-Term Care homes ([source](#)). The report reveals extreme neglect and exposes the extent of the horrific conditions facing residents, including “rotten food, cockroach infestations and a startling disregard for basic cleanliness” ([source](#), [source](#)).

June 1, 2020: Thousands of people across Canada protest George Floyd’s murder in the U.S. People are concerned about the virus spreading at protests, but most of them were outside.

June 12, 2020: Ontario enters Stage 2 of its reopening, except for Toronto, Windsor-Essex and Peel region.

Aug. 21, 2020: Premier Doug Ford announces an agreement with 3M to produce up to 100 million medical-grade N95 masks a year at its plant in Brockville, Ontario.

Sept. 25, 2020: Ontario re-imposes tougher lockdown restriction amid a surge in cases. Bars and restaurants are told to close by 11 p.m.

Dec. 10, 2020: Premier Doug Ford's office says that, after doing news conferences to provide updates on the pandemic response every day from Monday to Friday since March, Ford will stop the daily updates.

Dec. 14, 2020: A personal support worker in Toronto becomes the first person in Ontario to get a COVID-19 vaccine shot. Health care workers are the first to become eligible, kicking off the long process of getting most Ontarians vaccinated.

Dec. 26, 2020: Ontario goes into province-wide lockdown again right after Christmas in order to curb another wave of the virus. Only essential businesses are allowed to stay open. All others have to shut down.

2021

Jan. 12, 2021: Ontario calls another state of emergency and stay-at-home order to combat COVID-19.

Jan 13, 2021: A pilot mass vaccination centre opens at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. However, it closes just five days later due to a lack of vaccine stock.

Feb. 3, 2021: The province announces that in-person learning will resume at schools in most of Ontario in the coming weeks. Toronto's Medical Officer of Health says there 'is no perfect answer' it should be safe to do so.

Sept. 1, 2021: Ontario starts a vaccine passport system that requires people to show proof of vaccination in a range of settings, from gyms to movie theatres to restaurants.

Oct. 22, 2021: The Ontario government unveils a plan to lift all remaining public health restrictions by March.

Dec. 2, 2021: After nearly a year of trying to book appointments and waiting in long lines at popup vaccination sites, 90% of Ontario residents 12 and over have received at least one dose of a vaccine, while 87% have received their second.

2022

Jan. 20, 2022: Ontario says it will allow restaurants, gyms, cinemas and other indoor settings to reopen at 50% capacity as of Jan. 31 as part of a wider plan to gradually lift most COVID-19 restrictions by mid-March.

March 9, 2022: The Ontario government unveils its timeline for lifting all remaining COVID-19 restrictions and policies, with all restrictions set to end by the end of April.

March 10, 2022: After leading Toronto's COVID-19 strategic response team for two years, Chief Matthew Pegg says he'll return to his main function as the city's fire chief.

May 9, 2022: Tory formally ends a municipal state of emergency which had been in effect for a total of 777 days because of the pandemic.

July & August 2022: Multiple hospital Emergency Rooms close across the province due to shortages of healthcare workers, particularly nurses and doctors ([source](#)). Many healthcare workers retired or changed careers during the pandemic due to high levels of burnout ([source](#)).

Nov. 14 2022: Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore strongly recommends people continue to use a mask in indoor settings as hospitals are overwhelmed by a "triple threat" of COVID-19, RSV and flu infections, particularly affecting children. Moore is criticized for hypocrisy when he is spotted maskless at an indoors Toronto Life party just days later.

Nov. 17, 2022: The number of Ontarians whose deaths have been linked to COVID-19 has surpassed 15,000.

2023

January 30, 2023: The World Health Organization declared that the COVID-19 pandemic is still a global emergency ([source](#)).

March 10, 2023: Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam says that the COVID-19 virus has reached a relatively steady state in the country. However she says people who are older or immunocompromised continue to be disproportionately affected by the virus and urges people to keep up with their vaccinations.

Final Thoughts

For many in the Deaf and disabled community, the pandemic intensified barriers that already existed, leaving many feeling more isolated and more like an afterthought than ever before.

Financial challenges, loss of jobs, inequity in accessing medical care and food, and exclusion in policies, have disproportionately impacted the mental and physical health of persons with disabilities throughout the pandemic ([source](#)).

Many COVID-19 vaccine clinics were inaccessible, including the competitive booking process, and important information on vaccine safety and public health were distributed in inaccessible formats, especially for the Blind and Low Vision community ([source](#)). These are just a few of the many barriers experienced during the vaccine rollout.

In April 2021, the City announced the creation of Toronto's Accessibility Task Force on COVID-19 Vaccines, including an Accessibility Collaborative with North Yorkers and other non-profit organizations serving people with various disabilities across Toronto and Ontario ([source](#)).

Vaccine ambassadors with the Accessibility Collaborative, including myself, provided Deaf and disabled persons with information in accessible formats, coordinated vaccine appointments, and provided training to other Toronto non-profits on how they can make their services more accessible for people who experience multiple barriers.

I am genuinely so honoured to have had your trust when it comes to sharing information and dispelling misinformation over these past two years.

Although the project is ending, and many people are disregarding public health measures like wearing a mask, testing themselves for COVID-19, and staying home when they are sick, it is important to remember that COVID-19 is still prevalent in the community ([source](#), [source](#)).

Remember to stay up-to-date with your COVID-19 boosters, including following the recommendations by Health Canada and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).

For future questions about COVID-19, please try the following services:

1. You can call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 to speak to a health specialist. (TTY phone number for people who are deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired: 1-866-797-0007). This line is available in more than 300 languages, seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
2. If you are comfortable with speaking on the phone, you can book a phone appointment with the VaxFacts Clinic to speak with a trusted doctor from the Scarborough Health Network at www.shn.ca/vaxfacts or 416-438-2911 ext. 5738. If you are Black and would prefer to speak with a doctor who is also from the Black community, either tell them over the phone or scroll down on the web page, and you can book an appointment with them.

This line is not just for people in Scarborough; it's for everyone in Canada. This service is available in over 200 languages. Unfortunately, there is no TTY option.

3. You can always contact your local public health unit. To find your public health unit, click [here](#).

I wish everyone a safe and emotionally fulfilling 2023!

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Health Connect Ontario: 811

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675