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Toronto health officials say respiratory illnesses high, but levelling off



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Public health officials in Toronto say that the level of respiratory illness in the city remains high, but appears to be decreasing following a wave of infections over the holidays.

"COVID 19 and influenza activity are high in Toronto, but we know that influenza levels are decreasing," Associate Medical Officer of Health Dr. Irene Armstrong told the Toronto Board of Health during a presentation Monday.

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Per cent positivity for influenza sat at 6.6 per cent for the most recent week, compared to 15.6 per cent for the week previous.

COVID-19 per cent positivity was "high but stable," Armstrong said, sitting at 17.6 per cent for the most recent week, down slightly by one percentage point from the previous week.

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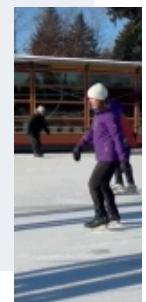
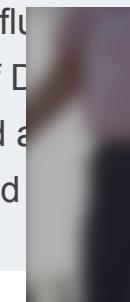
Ontario's COVID-19 wastewater signal has also leveled off after reaching more than a year-long high. The latest data from Public Health Ontario puts the number at 2.38. That is still nearly double what it was one year ago (1.38) but is virtually unchanged from

where it stood in mid-December, suggesting that transmission of the virus has at least plateaued for the time being.

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Meanwhile, after seeing a steady rise since September, and a spike over the holidays in late December, Toronto emergency department visits for respiratory disease are decreasing, though they remain at moderate levels.

"Influenza levels at this time are higher than the pre-pandemic historical average typical for this time of year," Armstrong said.



While there are signs that infections may be declining somewhat, the overall level of viral activity remains high. [WATCH: Vandalism attempt goes wrong in Trenton, Ont.](#) [Toddler bombs parents' marriage proposal on Michigan beach](#)

"While we are currently unable to update our wastewater dashboard, we are still monitoring the raw data and we see that both influenza and COVID 19 signals in Toronto wastewater are high but stable at this time," Armstrong said.

Health officials said there were 72 active COVID-19 outbreaks in healthcare institutions in the city as of Jan. 12. In addition, there were 15 influenza outbreaks and nine RSV outbreaks.

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Those numbers are similar to the amount of outbreaks seen around the same time in the 2022-2023 season, Armstrong said.

"Respiratory outbreak activity is high in hospitals, long term care homes and retirement homes across the city," she said. "This is not unexpected for this time of year. It is too early to determine if we are at a peak of overall respiratory outbreak activity in Toronto."

For the period of Jan. 2-10, TPH received reports of 122 COVID-19-related hospitalizations, eight new ICU admissions and 44 COVID-

isolated hospitalizations, eight new ICU admissions and 11 COVID-related deaths.

In Hamilton, health officials urged people last week to do what they can to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses as hospitals there are currently "under extreme pressure" and over capacity.

"We are seeing a high volume of sicker people in our EDs due to the viral season," Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) [said in a statement last week](#). "At the same time, staff absences due to illness are posing a challenge to meeting the needs of this increased volume of patients."

Adult acute occupancy across all HHS sites is consistently more than 100 per cent and some patients are currently being treated in surge spaces such as hallways, the hospital network said.

HHS said nine surgeries were deferred last week because of the situation and it is expediting patient discharges, where appropriate, in order to keep up with demand.

"Hamilton's healthcare partners are asking for the community's help in preventing the spread of respiratory illness this fall/winter season and preserving access to the city's urgent care and emergency resources for those who need them most," HHS said.

In order to reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses, people are still being encouraged to stay home if they feel sick and to use rapid tests to check if they have COVID-19. Health officials have cautioned that a single negative rapid test is not necessarily a conclusive indicator that person does not have COVID-19. Those who are sick should do multiple tests over several days in order to get a more accurate assessment.

Armstrong said that TPH is also working to provide access to the Novavax vaccine, a non-mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, which was approved by health Canada on December 5.

The health unit also expanded eligibility to the new RSV vaccine on December 7.

DECEMBER 7.



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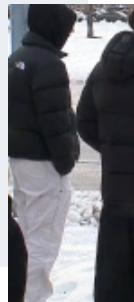
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Two-vehicle crash on Highway 21 claims one life Sunday morning

One person is dead and another is in a London hospital with serious injuries after a two-vehicle collision on Highway 21 in Saugeen Township.

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Quebec health minister makes surprise visit to over-capacity Montreal-area emergency room

Quebec Health Minister Christian Dube made a surprise visit to one of Montreal's busiest emergency rooms on Saturday and was optimistic about what is being done to alleviate pressure on the West Island institution.

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Utility piping at Algoma Steel's coke-making plant collapsed early Saturday morning. The incident has resulted in the discharge of liquid waste into St. Marys River. Company says they cannot confirm what exactly leaked from the broken piping into the water.

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The Rideau Canal Skateway is open for skaters between the Pretoria Bridge and Bank Street.

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Lakeshore OPP, LaSalle police investigating weekend homicide

The public is being asked to avoid two separate areas of Belle River and LaSalle on Sunday after police responded to a home on Saturday morning and located an individual with life-threatening injuries, who later died in hospital.

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Family, Orillia mourns six-year-old killed in deadly weekend crash

The City of Orillia is in mourning after a young girl was killed in a tragic crash Saturday night in the city's downtown core.

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Saint Andrews approves new look for Market Square and Market Wharf

Saint Andrews, N.B. is gearing up for a massive facelift after council announced it has unanimously approved plans to reconstruct Market Wharf and Market Square.

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NEW | Video of Indigenous woman zip tied by staff sparks protest at Marlborough Hotel

Upwards of 100 people stormed a downtown Winnipeg hotel Sunday in protest after a video surfaced showing an Indigenous woman being restrained by hotel staff with zip ties. The outcry comes as police and hotel staff allege the woman had been armed with a knife.

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The union representing SkyTrain employees in Metro Vancouver says it's prepared to shut down all services Monday in solidarity with bus supervisors as a deadline to resolve a dispute with Coast Mountain Bus Company looms.

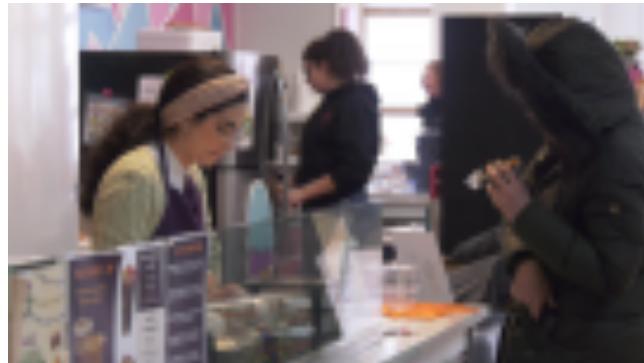
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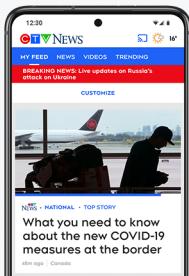
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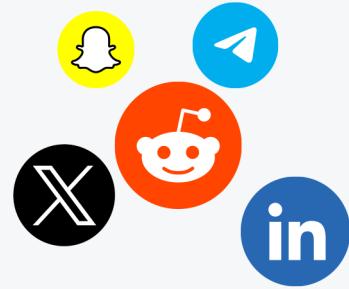
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