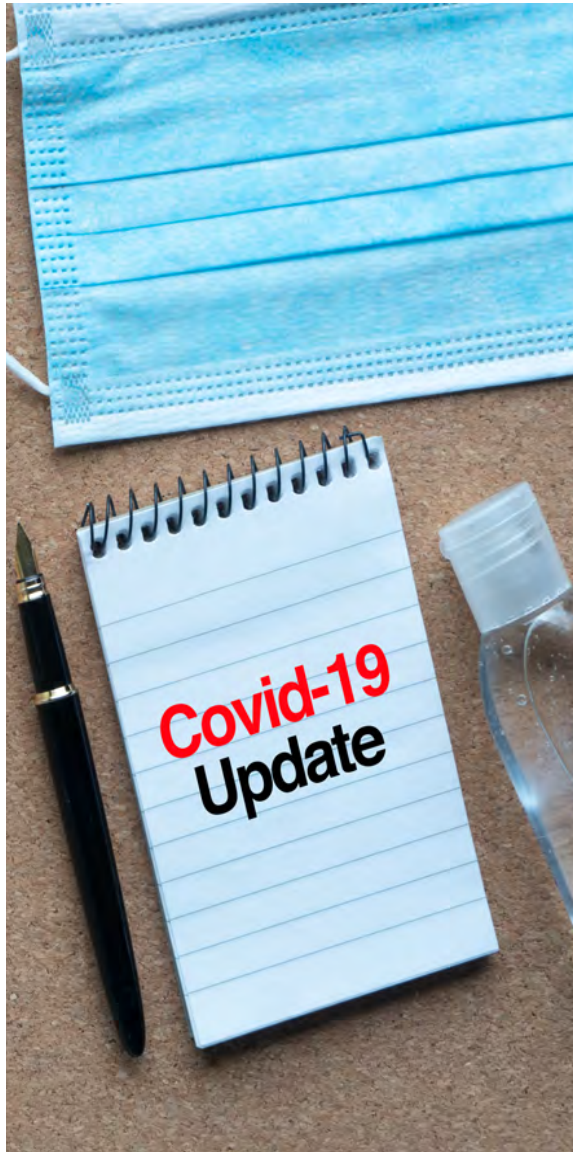


Current state of COVID-19 in Canada *(as of Aug. 15, 2023)*



Where are we at with COVID-19 currently?

Since March 2023, there has been a long period of gradual decline in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and ICU admissions. Some provinces and territories have been reporting a recent increase in activity, but levels of currently circulating COVID-19 are much lower than previous surges experienced between 2020 to 2022.

What is happening with new variants and what might we see in the fall?

In the past few months, a new Omicron subvariant called EG.5 has been circulating in Canada and other countries and is now estimated to account for ~1/3 of COVID-19 cases in Canada. This variant is part of the XBB family of Omicron, which currently constitutes most of the circulating COVID-19 in Canada. EG.5 has recently been designated a variant of interest by the World Health Organization. EG.5 appears to spread more easily than other variants in the same family. Some lab studies also suggest that it may be able to evade existing immunity; however, when looking at the genome there is very close alignment to XBB.1.5 (with only 2 new mutations in EG.5.1) and so the XBB vaccine pending this fall is expected to provide excellent protection. That said, it does not appear to cause more serious illness than other currently circulating variants.

While the seasonality of COVID-19 is still being established, we know that other respiratory viruses tend to have increased activity in the fall and winter months, and it's possible that there may be more COVID-19 activity during the fall.

What is the latest on COVID-19 vaccines?

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has recommended that all Canadians receive another dose of COVID-19 vaccine this fall. This vaccine will likely contain the XBB Omicron subvariant to reflect the most recent circulating strains. This is particularly important for certain population segments, including those aged 65 and older and/or with underlying medical conditions.

What is the bottom-line on COVID-19?

While we have learned to live with COVID-19, it remains a leading cause of infectious disease hospitalization and severe illness in Canada. The best way to keep yourself safe is to receive your COVID-19 vaccination as recommended by your healthcare provider. As well, given increased circulation of other respiratory viruses during the fall and winter months, getting all recommended vaccines (e.g., influenza, COVID-19) along with taking other precautions, like staying home while sick and regularly washing your hands, can help keep you and others from getting sick in the coming months. If you or someone you love is higher risk for severe illness, be sure to speak to your treating health care provider in advance of respiratory season to optimize your current care (COPD, control, asthma etc.) and have a plan in place to access treatment for respiratory illness (Paxlovid, Remdesivir, Tamiflu etc.).