

Toronto schools shutdown amid third wave of infections

6 April 2021, by Rob Gillies



Manda Zand, right, hugs her grandmother Farang Ahmadkorour, 92, after she received her COVID-19 vaccine at the Seneca College mass vaccination site during the coronavirus pandemic in Toronto, Tuesday, April 6, 2021. (Nathan Denette/The Canadian Press via AP)

Schools in Canada's largest city will shut down Wednesday and move to online learning because of a third surge of coronavirus infections fueled by more-contagious virus variants.

Toronto Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa said in a statement stronger measures are needed to reverse the surge.

"The spread of COVID-19 has never been greater in Toronto, with variants of concern increasing both the risk of transmission and the risk of serious illness or death," de Villa said in a statement.

Ontario has seen seeing more than 3,000 new infections a day in recent days and record intensive care numbers.

The move follows a similar move by the

neighboring Peel Region. The closures will be reevaluated later this month. Toronto has one of the largest school districts in North America.

Local health officials made the decision after the province declined to act. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who said earlier that schools are safe, has been criticized by health officials for not doing more to get infections under control.

Ford had refused to shut down shopping malls, but then admonished people for using them.

"Around the world, countries are facing a very serious third wave of this pandemic. And right now, so is Canada. This isn't the news any of us wanted, but hospitalizations are surging. ICU beds are filling up," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Tuesday.

He said he planned to talk with Ford "about what the spike in cases means for hospitals, and the importance of vaccinating as many people as possible, as quickly as possible."

Vaccinations have ramped up in Canada in recent weeks and all adults who want a vaccine are expected to get at least one dose by July.

York region, just north of Toronto, is also a hot spot of new infections, but has decided to keep schools open.

"At the direction of Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, York Region Public Health continues to follow the provincial Reopening Framework prioritizing schools remain open throughout all levels, even during the province-wide "emergency brake shutdown," a York region spokeswoman said in an email.

Laura Barr, a 40-year-old teacher in Toronto, said she's relieved her district has ended in class learning. Teachers at her school were teaching students in-person and online simultaneously.

"I was no longer feeling safe," she said. "It was very stressful trying to maintain distancing and other safety protocols in person while also interacting with students learning from home. I'm very relieved that schools have shut down; now I can focus on teaching without worrying that my health is being put in jeopardy."

She added she wished Ford had taken proper actions sooner to avoid a third wave. "It will be so hard for many families to make the necessary arrangements to adapt to remote learning with no notice," she said.

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