

MEETING NOTES & QUESTIONS/ANSWERS**Meeting (held on the Zoom platform):**

In attendance: Trustees Trixie Doyle & Rachel Chernos Lin; Superintendents Palmer, Howard, and Alviana-Alvarez; School Administrators & School Council members; Other TDSB Staff (including Wilmar Kortleeve, Shared Services Liaison); Members of TDSB's PIAC (Parent Involvement) and FSLAC (French as a Second Language) Advisory Committees; Parents/Caregivers/Guardians (#15).

Guests: Dr. Janine McCready (Michael Garron Hospital, Toronto East Health Network), Munira Khilji & Shabnam Meraj (Health Access Thorncliffe Park).

After the land acknowledgement, Trustees Chernos Lin and Doyle welcomed everybody. This meeting is held to provide information, in an accessible manner, about the COVID-19 vaccination for children, as the vaccine was recently introduced for 5-11 year olds. Special guest is Dr. McCready, who has led the effort on Covid testing as well as vaccination from Michael Garron Hospital (MGH) and the Toronto East Health Network (TEHN). Community effort has also been led by Health Access Thorncliffe Park, represented by Munira Khilji and Shabnam Meraj.

1. Presentation

Dr. McCready (Infectious Diseases Physician at Michael Garron Hospital) presented a slideshow about the Covid-19 Vaccine for Children Age 5-11.

Covered in the Presentation were the following topics:

- **About Dr. Janine McCready**
 - Dr. McCready's has been helping staff, physicians, community and schools safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - her friends and family are fully vaccinated.
- **What we know about the COVID-19 vaccine for Children aged 5-11 in Canada**
 - First dose appointments for children aged 5-11 started on November 23.
 - In Toronto, the vaccination percentage of children aged 5-11 ranges from about 20% (including Thorncliffe & Flemingdon) to 70%. It is important to get the vaccine information out as much as possible.
 - In the U.S., which started vaccinations of this age group a few weeks ahead of Canada, 5 million first doses have been given to children aged 5-11, and 1 million second doses. So far, no serious side effects at all have been reported.
- **Why it's important that children are vaccinated against COVID-19**
 - It protects children's health. Children are as likely as adults to be infected. Risk of severe illness (while lower than for adults) include multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C), as well as Post-COVID conditions or other long term effects.

- It protects vulnerable people around children, including seniors, pregnant people, and people who are immuno-compromised.
- It increases protection in the whole community, which helps end the pandemic.
- It helps children get back to “normal” and the things they love. This is vital for children’s health, happiness and development.
- **Why it’s important that children are vaccinated against COVID-19 (II)**
 - From October 2020 until October 2021 alone, 66 children died of Covid-19 in the United States. That is far more than the many years of deaths from all of Hepatitis A, Meningococcal (ACWY), Varicella, Rubella, an Rotavirus *combined* – illnesses we now routinely administer vaccines for.
- **Ontario COVID-19 outbreaks by type (7-day average).**
 - School outbreaks (especially elementary schools) currently far outpace outbreaks in other settings (mainly due to less vaccination among elementary age school children).
- **About the Pfizer clinical trials for children ages 5 to 11**
 - The study tested 3,000 children in 3 phases, in 4 countries (U.S., Finland, Poland, and Spain).
 - The dosage for 5-11 year olds that is currently being administered (10ug per dose) is much smaller than for adults, but enough to trigger a strong immune response.
- **Safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine**
 - Two doses of smaller, 10 ug child-size doses were 90.7% effective against lab-confirmed symptomatic COVID-19, including the Delta variant (Omicron was not circulating at the time of the study).
 - NO adverse events were reported during the trials (NO myocarditis/pericarditis; NO anaphylaxis or hypersensitivity, NO impact to development of fertility; NO multi-system inflammatory syndrome; NO severe cases of COVID-19). You CANNOT get Covid from the Vaccine, it contains NO live virus.
 - Most common side effects: most common is pain at the injection site (arm), then to a lesser extent fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills (typically going away in 24-48 hours).
- **Safety of the COVID-19 vaccine**
 - Side effect symptoms were significantly less among children than among adults.
- **Efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine**
 - Any dose of the vaccine is effective. So even if your child is 11y, just get the 10 ug child-size dose now, don’t wait until they are older to get the larger dose.
 - The efficacy depends on the development and maturity of the immune system, not factors like size or weight of the child.
- **Where to get the COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5 to 11 in East Toronto**

Book a first dose appointment:

 - on the Michael Garron website (tehn.ca/VaccineAppointment), or call 437-537-5131;
 - on the provincial booking system online (covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine/), or call 1-833-943-3900;
 - use the provincial pharmacy locator online (or visit a pharmacy in person);
 - contact your family doctor or paediatrician to confirm if they offer the vaccine.

MGH/TEHN also offer mobile clinics at school in priority neighbourhoods

 - If you have a child at one of these schools, information about the clinic will be shared with you.
 - Vaccines are available to children by walk-in at these clinics.
 - MGH/TEHN lists their mobile, drop-in, and school clinics at <https://www.tehn.ca/covid19/covid-19->

- Thu.December 16: **Gateway Public School (2-8pm, ages 5-11 only)**
- Thu.December 16: St. Joachim Catholic School (4-8pm, ages 5-11 only)
- Thu.December 16: William Burgess Elementary School (3:30-8pm, ages 5-11 only)
- Thu.December 16: **Thornccliffe Park Community Hub (8:15am-8pm, all ages)**
- Fri.Dec.17: Queen Alexandra Middle School (2-8pm, ages 5-11 only)
- Fri.Dec.17: Thornccliffe Park Community Hub (8:15am-8pm, all ages)
- Sat.Dec.18: Earl Beatty Jr and Sr. Public School (8am-4pm, ages 5-11 only)
- Sat.Dec.18: **Grenoble Public School (9 Grenoble Dr, 8am-4pm, all ages)**
- Sat.Dec.18: Gledhill Jr. Public School (8am-4pm, ages 5-11 only)
- Sat.Dec.18: **Thornccliffe Park Community Hub (8:15am-8pm, all ages)**
- Sun.Dec.19: Samuel Hearne Middle School (8am-4pm, all ages)
- Sun.Dec.19: Bowmore Road Jr. and Sr School (8am-4pm, ages 5-11 only)
- Sun.Dec.19: **Thornccliffe Park Community Hub (8:15am-8pm, all ages)**
- Starting Thursday, Dec.16, 2nd or 3rd doses will also be offered to adults bringing their kids to clinics.

- **How to help your child have a comfortable vaccination experience.**

- Make an appointment whenever possible.
- Talk to your child about the COVID-19 vaccine and why it is important.
- Dress your child in comfortable clothing.
- Bring items that comfort your child (like blankets, stuffies, or something to read/watch).
- Bring a positive distraction (such as fidget toy, or smart phone, or tablet).
- Consider applying pain management relief if needed (e.g. topical numbing, child dose pain medication).
- Consider a comfort(able) position.

- **What to expect after your child is vaccinated**

- Most common temporary side effects: pain at injection site (arm), fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills (all goes away in day or so). If you think side effects are not normal, contact your child's doctor.
- Vaccines are only one tool against Covid-19, you can still get Covid -- keep following public health advice including masking, keeping safe distances, ventilation, etc

- **Helpful vaccine resources for families**

Information to be posted as soon as available at www.tdsb.on.ca/Ward11. It includes resources for 1-on-1 conversations with an expert if so desired (through Sick Kids Hospital and/or the VaxFacts Clinic Hotline at Scarborough Health Network

- **Where to get a child-friendly COVID-19 test and other supports in East Toronto**

Options include Covid-19 Outreach Centres (www.tehn.ca/CovidOutreachCentres: Flemingdon Park, Taylor-Massey, Warden Woods, Leslieville, Danforth Village and more), the MGH COVID-19 Assessment Centre (www.tehn.ca/AssessmentCentre), and the MGH Emergency Department's Child and Youth Emergency Zone (www.thn.ca/EmergencyDepartment).

2. Additional Information

Accompanying this meeting report are:

- Dr. McCready's slideshow presentation & Resources: to be posted shortly at www.tdsb.on.ca/Ward11.
- An information sheet (provided by Dr. McCready) about the Rapid Antigen Tests that are sent home with school children (how to administer, how to report a positive result, next steps). Also see TSB information at: <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/News/Article-Details/ArtMID/474/ArticleID/1737/ParentGuardian-Message-from-Toronto-Public-Health>.
- Information (Flyers and Flyers in Bengali, Tamil, Urdu, and Punjabi) about **COVID-19 & Kids – Vaccine Townhall with the South Asian Community**, to be held **Thursday, December 16, 7-8pm**. Bengali, Tamil, Urdu, and Punjabi translation available!
Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88160823659?pwd=bFEzU3ErcEhra21NQzJkOXZYczJBQT09>

3. Questions & Answers

- Q: What kind of activities should kids be allowed to do after the shot?
A: It depends on the child. Dr. McCready didn't plan anything big for the afternoon of the shots for her kids, just in case they felt more tired. But the next morning her son (8y) had no trouble at all running around the gym and shooting hoops. Her 4y old was jumping and running all over the place, seemingly with more energy than usual out of excitement about getting the vaccine. There is no restrictions if the child feels fine.
- Q: How long should you wait after the Flu Shot?
A (Dr. McCready): For 5-11 year olds, the National Immunization Council NACI said ideally to wait 14 days. That was really just a precaution, to make sure if a child feels lousy from the flu shot. The U.S. has had no separation at all, and there have been no issues reported. Nothing bad will happen if you wait only a week. If your child has not had their flu shot yet, prioritize the Covid-shot, as we see much more Covid than flu at the moment. So get the Covid shot first, flu shot two weeks later, and you are still fine with the timing for the second Covid shot.
- Q: Is there enough data from the studies to support the vaccine?
A (Dr. McCready): Yes, 100%. There were 3000 kids in the official Pfizer study, but there have now also been literally billions of adults who have gotten the shot and many millions of 12-17 year olds. The studies were building on all of that data. And now we have 5 million children 5-11 years old in the United States with a first dose, and 1 million with a second dose. These are all carefully monitored, and nothing serious has emerged. It is exceedingly unlikely that something will come up. One of the things we were really looking for is myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle), but it looks as if there is virtually no risk of that – no cases have been reported. Lower risk than for 12-17y olds was expected, because the dosage is lower, and the risk diminished the younger the older children were.

- Q: Why is there a vaccine recommendation now, as compared with earlier in the pandemic?
A (Dr. McCready): Partly, it is extra care & precautions taken before administering any vaccines to children. We also realized more children were actually getting Covid than we thought in the beginning of the pandemic – they were not tested as much because they presented with no, or fewer, symptoms.
- Q: Why do we see more kids with Covid now than before?
A (Dr. McCready): Children are now a predominant part of the unvaccinated segment of the population, and they are gathering together. However good the protocols at schools are, kids will behave as kids, and occasionally take masks off and such. Children are also interacting outside school. Omicron also seems very, very infectious. It almost spreads like chicken pox, and will likely circulate very rapidly. The hope was that vaccinating all the adults would bring down the infections among the kids as well, but that did not happen to that extent, because kids are getting it and transmitting to each other. Meaning it is extra important to vaccinate the 5-11 year olds. Most will get mild cases of Covid, but if you get enough people infected, some will get severe disease. And they can also still spread it to parents and others.
- Q: Do you see an end to this?
A (Dr. McCready): I hope so. There are a few possibilities. Firstly, we need to make sure the entire world gets vaccinated. Because otherwise Covid will continue to spread, and new variants will emerge. Otherwise, there are many different ways this can evolve. Some experts say that this Omicron variant may cause 'everybody' to get Covid, which may dampen future waves as everybody has some immunity. But that would cause a lot of hardship in the short term.
I do not think things will stay as they are now. Covid itself, as a virus, will be part of our existence. But I do not think we will be testing kids and sending them home for years and years.
- Q: Booster Shots?
A (Dr. McCready): What we have seen so far with Omicron is that the vaccine likely still protects against severe disease and hospitalizations, but much less against infection itself, especially if your second dose is longer ago. The third dose restores immunity.
Right now, everybody over 50 is eligible, but we expect everybody over 18 will be eligible soon as well (please note, since time of this meeting, the province has announced everyone 18 and up is eligible for a booster as of Friday, Dec. 17). At the clinics, we try and get the third dose out to as many people as we can, even ahead of schedule.
- Q: Do you need to wait 168 or 180 days for your booster?
A (Dr. McCready): 168, definitely. And if you are in any way immunocompromised, it is only 56 days.
***Please note, after this meeting, the Provincial Government announced the shortening of the interval to 84 days)**
- Q: Can parents that come to the clinic with their child, but are not yet 50 years old, get the booster?

A (Dr. McCready): Yes. There is no point waiting for just another week or so. Especially in high priority neighbourhoods, like Flemingdon and Thorncliffe, where many people got their first and second doses earlier. They should get their booster as soon as possible.

- Q: Are we prioritizing Teachers?

A: (Dr. McCready) Yes, at the school clinics teachers and staff can get their shots as well. Ideally, they should wait for the 168 day since their second shot, but we are flexible if people are close. We don't want people to get Covid as they waiting for a week or two. ***Please note rules have been revised and booster are now allowed with an interval of 84 days since the second shot.**

- Q: Are children going to need a third shot because of Omicron, at the same timeline?

A: (Dr. McCready) For kids, there no plan to give boosters or third doses at this point. There is no data, and for 5-11 year olds we are of course only now starting to give first and second doses. If kids will need third doses, I do not expect that any time soon.

- Q: What are the side effects of the booster?

A: (Dr. McCready) Everybody reacts differently, but they are similar to the first shots: some pain the arm, maybe a headache, in some cases a fever or chills. For almost everybody, effects subside in 24-48 hours.

For more questions, always feel free to contact Trustees Chernos Lin (Rachel.ChernosLin@tdsb.on.ca) and/or Trustee Doyle (Trixie.Doyle@tdsb.on.ca).



Joint Ward Forum

Community Q&A on the COVID Vaccine for Children Tuesday, December 14, 2021