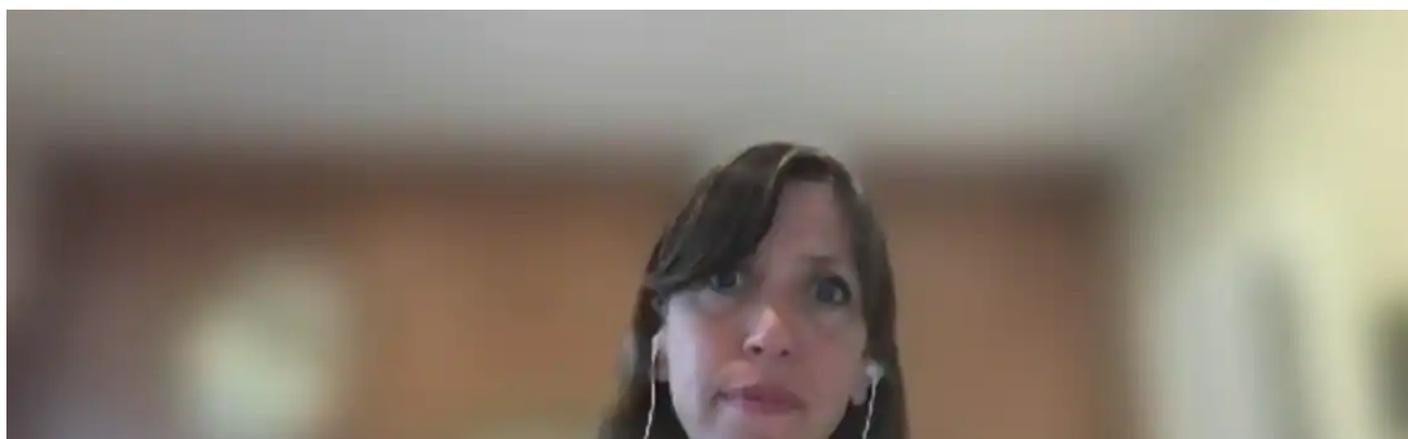


Ottawa

## Time to take 7th COVID wave seriously, Etches warns

Ottawa's top doctor urges residents to limit contacts, resume masking

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As Ottawa's seventh wave arrives, residents should take steps to reduce transmission, OPH says

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Dr. Vera Etches, Ottawa's medical officer of health, says a return to outdoor activities and wearing masks in crowded indoor spaces will help cut COVID-19 transmission as cases rise once again.

Ottawa residents should consider limiting in-person contact and businesses should consider requiring customers to wear masks indoors to protect the most vulnerable during what's become a concerning seventh wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city's medical officer of health urged Thursday.

COVID-19 levels are currently very high in the capital, Dr. Vera Etches wrote [in a new statement](#), her first since April.

Key pandemic indicators — hospitalizations, test positivity, the number of outbreaks and amount of coronavirus measured in the city's wastewater — are all on the rise, she said.

Now, Etches says it's time for further measures.

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Doug Manuel, a senior scientist at The Ottawa Hospital, says an increase in social gatherings and a lack of long-term immunity is leading to a rise in infections stemming from the more transmissible BA.5 coronavirus subvariant.

She's now recommending wearing masks in crowded outdoor spaces and seeing fewer people in person. Businesses can lead by example by bringing back certain measures, she said.

Familiar guidance about wearing masks indoors, staying home when sick and getting booster shots remains unchanged.

"If you haven't yet taken this wave seriously, now's a good time to start," said OPH in its weekly snapshot on Twitter.

[Last week](#), Ottawa Public Health (OPH) warned the tens of thousands of residents who have been vaccinated but haven't received a booster shot that they're no longer adequately protected against newer Omicron subvariants.

"Those aged 60 and over remain at high risk for severe illness and complications from COVID-19, yet over 25,000 Ottawa residents over the age of 60 have yet to access their third dose (first booster), and over 88,000 still require their fourth dose (second booster)," Etches said.

She welcomed Thursday's news that Ontario [is opening COVID-19 vaccine appointments next week](#) for children aged six months to five years old, along with fourth doses for immunocompromised youth ages 12 to 17.

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