Clean Indoor Air Toronto

team@cleanindoorairto.ca | Toronto, Ontario

Toronto Board of Health
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen St. W.
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

June 2, 2025

To the Toronto Board of Health;

We are *Clean Indoor Air Toronto*, a group of concerned Toronto residents who are dedicated to improving indoor air quality in our shared public spaces. Many of us are parents of children attending TDSB schools; other members of our group have chronic health conditions that make them vulnerable to infection. We are joined with many other concerned Toronto residents and organizations in making the requests outlined below.

As you know, Ontario is suffering from its largest outbreak of measles in decades. While the bulk of the nearly 2,000 confirmed cases have been in southwestern Ontario, per Toronto Public Health's data, only 69% of Toronto's 7-year-olds and 87% of its 17-year-olds are vaccinated against measles.[1] There is also a large number of residents who only ever received one dose of the vaccine, making them under-protected, and a smaller but highly vulnerable segment whose bodies do not respond to the vaccine or have contraindications for it.

There is no debate that vaccines are the primary defense against measles. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that Toronto will be able to reach the 95% vaccination coverage needed to meet the herd immunity threshold any time soon.[2] While we strongly support on-going vaccine-focused outreach efforts, it must be acknowledged that if we genuinely want to prevent a measles outbreak in our city, we need to think beyond vaccines.

Thankfully, we have the tools and knowledge to achieve this goal. In reference to Ontario School Safety's open letter[3], we call on TPH to implement a "vaccine-plus" strategy to minimize the spread of measles in our city. Key to this strategy is highlighting information on how improving indoor air quality (IAQ) can reduce the risk of measles, a disease spread primarily through the air.

While the importance of IAQ and clean air is understood by public health officials, much of the public is unaware that measles is actually a respiratory virus that is spread primarily through the air, and that the risk is especially high in crowded spaces and poorly ventilated areas. Public health messaging has been solely focused on vaccination, and makes no mention of how the proper use of ventilation and air filtration, and wearing a well-fitted high-quality mask can effectively reduce risk of infection.[4–7]

It is essential for TPH, a trusted authority with a wide reach, to address this knowledge gap with a comprehensive campaign that includes practical recommendations such as hosting events outside, improving ventilation, using air filters, increasing fresh air by opening windows and doors, and yes, wearing well-fitted high-quality masks. This campaign must be multi-modal and incorporated into the TPH's in-person actions as well as shared via online and real-world promotional efforts.

In particular, we call for a special focus on Toronto's schools and childcare centres, which depend on TPH for guidance and will likely be ground zero for any local measles outbreak. TPH has not provided any additional information on measles to school boards and childcare centres since February 21, 2025 and that information focused solely on vaccination prior to travelling for March Break, with no mention of the protective layers to reduce risk of airborne transmission. Simple yet detailed directions that walk staff through the actions

needed to keep themselves and their students protected from airborne disease need to be provided to school boards and childcare centres as soon as possible. To ensure that the entire school community receives this vital information, TPH should direct the school boards to send this information out through their central messaging systems. This vital information should not be left to the discretion of principals and school staff to distribute. Additionally, these directions must also be made readily available to families of students and staff so that they too are empowered with the knowledge they need to stay safe.

We strongly support TPH's efforts to increase vaccine uptake and believe that further messaging, especially aimed at the school community, is needed. However, a vaccine-only approach is one that is inadequate and will ultimately lead to sick Torontonians and further burden our fragile healthcare system. It is imperative for the health of our city and its residents that TPH think beyond vaccines and proactively include information regarding protections against airborne diseases and guidance on improving indoor air quality. As an added benefit, by putting in place measures to prevent measles, we will also see a reduction in other airborne disease and health conditions, including COVID-19, which is once again seeing increased rates of infection.[8]

We also wish to remind the Board of Health that a report on air ventilation with regards to updating the Property Standards Bylaw was requested from TPH on March 12, 2022.[9] Even though a status report was requested on January 16, 2023 by a member of the Board, the public has yet to receive any information regarding this report.[10] We recognize that indoor air quality may be seen to fall under the jurisdiction of multiple government agencies and we urge the Board to consider working with other municipal agencies to develop an indoor air quality policy that provides a minimum ventilation rate with a target clean air delivery rate, and a minimum standard for air filtration that adheres to the latest recommendations from expert organizations including ASHRAE, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, and The *Lancet* COVID-19 Commission Task Force.[11–13] An indoor air quality policy will protect and promote the health of the people of Toronto, by protecting us from exposure to harmful air pollution arising from climate change, man-made indoor air pollutants like microplastics, AND serious airborne infectious diseases including measles.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of Clean Indoor Air Toronto:
(31 names hidden for privacy)

Safe Air Collective

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