



Local News

Merton parents plead to extend vaccination pilot project by a few blocks

"We're just on the other side of the H4W postal code identified in the pilot project, yet 55 per cent of our population lives within that postal code," says Debbie Schwarcz, an emergency room physician and family doctor who has two boys attending Merton

Jason Magder • Montreal Gazette
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Five-year-olds Ethan Rosenshein, left, and goalie Ben Cytrynbaum pass the time Sunday in front of Merton School. Parents say the school should be included in a vaccination blitz being conducted by public health because the school is just a few blocks away from the designated zone. PHOTO BY DAVE SIDAWAY /Montreal Gazette

Parents of Merton school students say they should be included in a vaccination blitz being conducted by public health, because the school is just a few blocks away from the designated zone.

“We’re just on the other side of the H4W postal code identified in the pilot project, yet 55 per cent of our population lives within that postal code,” said Debbie Schwarcz, an emergency room physician and family doctor in the Montreal area, who has two boys attending Merton.



“The COVID variant doesn’t spread according to postal codes.”

Last week, Montreal’s public health department announced that a new vaccination campaign would begin in hopes of reducing the spread of the B.1.1.7 variant in the region. The campaign, being conducted as a pilot project, aims to vaccinate 27 schools and roughly 50 daycare centres in the Côte-St-Luc and Snowdon areas of Montreal where the variant has been predominant.

The schools and daycares covered by the pilot project are in postal codes H3S, H3J and H3W in Côte-des-Neiges, and H4W in Côte-St-Luc.

Of the 27 schools, 14 are public, eight are private Jewish schools, and three are other private schools.

Among the English public schools covered by the pilot project are Coronation, John Grant High School, Mile End High School Program and Sir Mortimer B. Davis. However, several schools, including Merton, are just outside the targeted area. They are Edinburgh School and Mountainview School. English Montreal School Board spokesperson Mike Cohen said the board has heard from parents of several schools hoping to be included in the project.

“We as a board are waiting patiently for Phase Two of this pilot project,” Cohen said. “We are hopeful this will go well and that these schools will be included in the next round.”

Schwarcz said Merton has had cases of the variant. She has been vaccinated for two months already as a healthcare worker, and her husband works at Herzliah High School, which is part of the project, so he was vaccinated on Monday. Still, she feels the need to advocate on behalf of Merton, which had a documented case of the same variant in February.

“I feel this will limit the success of the pilot project by not vaccinating a group of people smack in the middle of the area you’re trying to target,” she said. “The more successful this pilot project is, the better the chance that this can be rolled out to other parts of the region.”

A teacher at one of the public schools near the affected area said he, too, was upset that his school wasn’t covered as part of the project. He said public health should make a greater effort to vaccinate teachers.

“From a logistics standpoint, parents see one student a day, teachers see 100 students,” said the teacher, who didn’t want his name used for fear of retribution.

Jean-Nicolas Aubé, a spokesperson for the public health department, said there was a limited number of doses of vaccine for the pilot project, so the department had to prioritize certain schools.

He said roughly 15,000 doses are reserved for the pilot project, and as of the end of the day on Monday, the first day the vaccination campaign, there were nearly 9,000 appointments booked.

“We are very happy with this response; it’s very good news,” Aubé said. He added that parents of Merton school could be added to the project if there are enough doses left. A decision about that could come by the end of the week.

Aubé would not say why public health chose certain schools and not others.

The schools included in the pilot project:

- École Bedford
- École Saint-Pascal-Baylon
- École Félix-Leclerc
- École Socrates-Démosthène, Campus Socrates II

- École communautaire Belz, Campus Hillsdale (English section)
- Yeshiva Gedola-Merkaz Hatorah de Montréal (English and French sections)
- École Lucille-Teasdale
- Externat Mont-Jésus-Marie
- Hôpital Sainte-Justine
- École Sir Mortimer B. Davis

- École des Nations
- L'Académie Beth Rivkah pour filles
- École secondaire Programme Mile-End
- École Yaldei
- École La Voie
- Les écoles Azrieli Talmud Torah — Herzliah, Campus Adams (English and French sections)
- École des Amis-du-Monde
- Académie Yéshiva Yavné
- Académie hébraïque, inc. (English and French sections)
- École Maïmonide, Campus Parkhaven
- École secondaire John Grant
- École de la Mosaique
- Les Écoles juives populaires et les Écoles Peretz Inc. (English and French sections)

jmagder@postmedia.com

twitter.com/jasonmagder

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