



News / Local News

# Some parents in areas with high COVID-19 variant cases will be vaccinated next week

*It is not clear yet whether teachers and daycare educators in Côte-St-Luc and Snowdon will also be eligible for vaccination.*

Marian Scott • Montreal Gazette  
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"Our goal is to cut the household transmission," said Montreal public-health director Dr. Mylène Drouin. PHOTO BY JOHN MAHONEY /Montreal Gazette

All parents whose children attend schools and daycares in most of Côte-St-Luc and Côte-des-Neiges will be able to get a COVID-19 vaccine as of Monday, in an effort to control the spread of highly contagious variants.

The goal of the two-week pilot project is to slow community transmission of new strains, in particular the B.1.1.7 variant, which has proliferated in those neighbourhoods, Montreal public health director Dr. Mylène Drouin said at a press conference at the Université de Montréal's new campus in northern Outremont.



Public health officials believe the reason the highly contagious variant is spreading in those hot spots is that children are contracting the virus at school or daycare and transmitting it to their parents, she said.

"What we've learned is that we have a pattern of transmission that has started from daycare and schools to households and after that to (other) settings, (in the) workplace or community," she said.

Drouin said 26 per cent of all the COVID-19 cases in Montreal linked to the B.1.1.7 variant are in the neighbourhoods targeted by the pilot project.

“The variants in those neighbourhoods have been predominant for a few weeks, since the beginning of February,” she said.

“We do have variants in other neighbourhoods, but they are more sporadic,” Drouin said.

“We’ve seen, for example, in Côte St-Luc, more than 86 per cent of our variant cases are associated with a daycare centre or a school,” Drouin said.

Letters were sent Thursday to all parents of children attending school or daycare in the designated areas, urging them to book “an appointment quickly to help stop the spread of the new variant and to reduce the risks of a major third wave.”

The parents’ home address is not important; eligibility is determined by the location of the child’s school or daycare. Small family daycares are not included, Drouin said. Parents must present proof of address and the child’s school registration.

Public health officials are expecting about 70 per cent of parents in the targeted neighbourhoods to comply and get the jab.

The schools and daycares covered by the pilot project are in postal codes H3S, H3T and H3W in Côte-des-Neiges, and H4W in Côte-St-Luc. Schools just outside those postal codes, such as Merton School on Robinson Ave. in Côte-St-Luc and Edinburgh School on Hudson Ave. in Montreal West, are excluded.

Of the 25 schools, 14 are public, eight are private Jewish schools, and three are other private schools. They include La Mosaique, JPPS, Maimonides and Hebrew Academy in Côte-St-Luc; and Bedford, St-Pascal-Baylon, Mont-Jésus-Marie, Beth Rivkah Academy for Girls and Azrieli Talmud-Torah-Herzliah in Côte-des-Neiges.

About 12,000 children attend schools and daycares in the two neighbourhoods, Drouin said.

Critics denounced the fact that teachers and daycare workers won’t be vaccinated in the pilot project.

Education Minister Jean-François Roberge tweeted that in his view, teachers should also get the jab.

“It is obvious that in areas where parents of children attending schools will be immunized, school staff must also have access to the vaccine,” he posted on Twitter.

Jean-François Del Torchio, a spokesperson for Roberge, said the minister feels it only makes sense for teachers to get the vaccine. “It should be obvious,” he said.

However, he said neither Roberge nor other members of the provincial cabinet has a say over the parameters for the pilot project, which are determined by Quebec’s committee on immunization.

## innovative vaccine pilot project to get ahead of variants in Montreal



Speaking to reporters Thursday, Quebec Health Minister Christian Dubé praised Drouin for her innovative approach and for trying to get ahead of the variants.

Asked whether he believes vaccination should be extended to teachers and daycare educators in the neighbourhoods, Dubé did not answer, saying he wants to see how the project evolves.

“It needs to be complementary to what we’re already doing,” he said. “What the project is doing is targeting populations in specific regions, it’s not at all contrary to what we’re doing elsewhere.

“We know the variants will hit more in those areas, so (Drouin) asked to vaccinate there faster.”

The English Montreal School Board, which has four schools in the pilot project, also called for teachers to be immunized. The EMSB wrote to Drouin Thursday requesting that teachers get the jab, EMSB spokesperson Mike Cohen said.

Drouin said that while teachers and daycare staff are not included for the moment, public health officials might consider including them at a later date.

Cohen also noted that some parents are disappointed that schools just outside the designated areas were left out.

“We understand that they have a difficult task ahead. It’s not like they could include every single school,” said Cohen, who spoke with public health officials Thursday.

“We just hope that the pilot project goes well and that they’ll include more schools,” he added.

The EMSB schools covered by the pilot project are Coronation, John Grant High School, Mile End High

School Program and Sir Mortimer B. Davis.

Drouin said she understood that parents in nearby schools also want the vaccine, but health authorities had to draw the line somewhere.

“It is important to say that it is a pilot project,” she said.

“We always have to stop somewhere,” she added.

“We know that we have schools in other areas that have had the variant,” Drouin said.

Mitchell Brownstein, the mayor of Côte-St-Luc, welcomed the news that parents at local schools would be vaccinated.

“You stop the super spreaders, you stop the virus,” he said.

Vaccination gives the public health department “another tool to stop this very contagious variant,” he said. “If they can stop it, it’s going to help all Quebecers,” he said.

*Jesse Feith of the Montreal Gazette contributed to this report.*

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