

New paper: Katz, A., Li, T., James, L. et al. **Emergency Knowledge Translation, COVID-19 and indoor air: evaluating a virtual ventilation and filtration consultation program for community spaces in Ontario.** *BMC Public Health* 24, 2682 (2024). Full text available [here](#).

**Who we are:** An interdisciplinary team with training and experience in indoor air quality, engineering, aerosol science, community programming, public health, epidemiology and knowledge translation.

**What we want you to know:**

- If you work in a community space and have questions about improving indoor air quality, please come talk to our indoor air quality experts through our [free, virtual consultation program](#) and visit our online [indoor air checklist for community spaces](#).

- Improving indoor air can involve new infrastructure, but small changes also make a difference. For example, facilities that consulted with us: increased maintenance of HVAC systems; upgraded bathroom fans that exhaust to the outside; and, increased use of portable air filters

- Indoor air quality is an essential part of infection prevention and control. Unfortunately, public health authorities do not always emphasize or even include measures such as ventilation and filtration in advice about mitigating infectious diseases.

- Improving indoor air quality has many benefits to health and wellbeing in general. For example, better indoor air can help reduce symptoms of chronic diseases such as asthma.

**About the paper:**

Background: In October 2021, we reviewed Public Health Ontario's COVID-19 guidance for settings such as shelters and long-term care homes. We found that this guidance did not include ventilation or filtration, which can help reduce transmission of infectious diseases (1).

What we did: We created plain language resources, such as an [indoor air checklist for community spaces](#). In addition, in April 2022, we launched a [virtual ventilation and filtration consultation program](#), which gives people working in community spaces direct access to indoor air quality experts from University of Toronto and University of Waterloo.

What happened: Thirty community organizations such as shelters, drop-ins and community clinics came to see us during the first year of the program. In April 2023, we sent them an online evaluation. Representatives from 11 organizations completed the survey.

What we learned: When presented with brief access to expert support and tailored plain language guidance, people working in community spaces increased the use of ventilation and filtration to help control COVID-19. For example, following consultations, some facilities: increased maintenance of HVAC systems; upgraded bathroom fans that exhaust to the outside; and, increased use of portable air filters. While people took additional action following our sessions, we also learned about barriers that people faced. These included:

- Lack of long-term, sustainable funding for ventilation and filtration in community spaces;
- Lack of emphasis on ventilation and filtration in public health guidance and infection prevention and control materials;
- Confusing information from public health organizations about the utility of portable air filters (portable air filters are useful!);
- Lack of free, reliable, expert services available to come onsite to diagnose indoor air and other building-related issues.

Author details: Amy Katz<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Tianyuan Li<sup>3</sup>, LLana James<sup>4,5</sup>, Pearl Buhariwala<sup>1</sup>, Jo-Ann Osei-Twum<sup>6</sup>, Jeffrey Siegel<sup>6,7</sup> and Patricia O’Campo<sup>1,6</sup>

1. MAP, St. Michael’s Hospital, Unity Health Toronto
2. Faculty of Information, University of Toronto
3. Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Waterloo
4. Anansi Health & Innovation Consortium
5. Department of Biomedical and Molecular Sciences and School of Rehabilitation Therapy, Queen’s University
6. Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto
7. Department of Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

For more information: To make an appointment for the virtual ventilation and filtration program, please contact Pearl Buhariwala at pearl.buhariwala@unityhealth.to. For more information about the paper, please contact at Amy Katz at amy.katz@utoronto.ca

Reference: Katz, A., Li, T., James, L., Siegel, J., & O’Campo, P. (2023). [Systematically omitting indoor air quality: sub-standard guidance for shelters, group homes and long-term care in Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). *Critical Public Health*, 33(5), 683–696.