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## Vaccine doses trickle into Canada this week, before floodgates open

The Public Health Agency of Canada is expecting a smaller-than-expected shipment of COVID-19 vaccines this week, with fewer than 445,000 doses of Pfizer-BioNTech shots scheduled for delivery over the next two days.

Yet that seeming trickle is set to explode into a full-blown flood starting the week of March 22 as the companies dramatically ramp up their deliveries and other pharmaceutical firms start making good on their own promised shipments.

The Public Health Agency says this coming week will be the last in which Canada will receive fewer than 1 million doses over a seven-day period. Pfizer and BioNTech shots are on tap to deliver more than that each week for the foreseeable future.

Canada is also expected to start receiving more shots of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine starting in April, as well as Johnson & Johnson's one-dose inoculation. Those are in addition to the bi-weekly delivery of doses from Moderna, the next of which is scheduled for the week of March 22.

Public Procurement Minister Anita Anand said on Friday that Canada is on track to receive 7 million vaccine doses from the various companies by the end of April, with a total of 36.5 million delivered by the end of June and 118 million before Sept. 30.

This week's expected full orders amid a report that more than 3 million COVID-19 vaccine doses had been administered in Canada as of Sunday, according to COVID19tracker.ca, with more than six per cent of the population having received a dose.



The coming week is also expected to see Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization release new guidance on the AstraZeneca vaccine for seniors after initially discouraging their use for older residents.

Those vaccines have been under the spotlight over the past week amid concerns within some European countries about alleged links to blood clots, though Canadian officials have said there is no scientific evidence to suggest such a link.

"There's not a good biological explanation about why a vaccine of this type, injected into a muscle, would cause that kind of adverse event," Health Canada's chief medical adviser Dr. Sagriva Sharma told The Canadian Press last week.

Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Bulgaria are among almost a dozen European nations that passed the use of AstraZeneca's vaccine last week - either entirely or specific batches - after reports of some patients developing blood clots afterward. Ireland joined the list on Sunday.

None of those countries' health officials said there was evidence of a link, but rather they were passing up the product out of an abundance of caution pending a review.

AstraZeneca released a statement on Sunday saying a review of 17 million patients who received the shot in Europe and the United Kingdom showed no elevated risk of blood clotting.

Ana Taylor, the company's chief medical officer, said there's no increased risk of either pulmonary embolism, deep vein thrombosis or thrombocytopenia in any age group, gender, batch or vaccine or country.

The company said there are reports of 15 patients experiencing deep-vein thrombosis and 22 pulmonary embolisms as of March 8, which is much lower than what would occur naturally in a population of more than 17 million people.

Germany, France, Poland, Nigeria and the United Kingdom are all among the countries joining Canada in sticking with AstraZeneca injections.

## Head of Ontario's vaccine task force set to leave as province's vaccine booking system launches

The head of Ontario's vaccine task force will leave his job in the coming weeks, Premier Doug Ford said Monday.

The news about retired general Rick Hillier comes with Ontario reporting an additional 1,248 COVID-19 cases, and the province's vaccine booking system launching both by phone and online for those over the age of 70.

During the province's news conference Monday, Ford said Hillier will only be around "for a couple more weeks," as his Ontario Council is winding up. Hillier's contract expires on March 31.

"I tried to get him to renew it, but as he said, 'Doug, I did the job I came for, and we got everything set up,'" said Ford, who indicated he agreed with that sentiment.

Thousands of people logged on to Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine booking system within minutes on Monday morning, with many reporting long waitlines and messages.

Tommy's sense Stephanie Prosper told CBC News this morning she was able to get onto the system and fill out the required information by 8:55 a.m. - just five minutes after the government website and an accompanying phone line officially went live.

She had been trying to book vaccine appointments online for her aunt, uncle and their neighbour, who are all seniors living in Niagara.

By then, there were already 10,000 people ahead of her in the queue, with her wait time estimated to be "more than an hour."

Prosper, who works in a COVID-19 assessment centre, said she is worried about people navigating the site who aren't tech savvy.

"A lot of the seniors don't really have computers, some of them don't have family members to help them," she told Metro Morning host Isabella

## Head of Ontario's vaccine task force set to leave as province's vaccine booking system launches

Allison Monday morning.

Ford said Monday he was a little nervous when the new system launched, but that this far he's happy with what he's seen, with more than 45,000 people booked.

"I was just praying all night this thing wasn't going to crash," Ford said, while presenting to "live out" any issues.

Reports of a message error message

Some who used the site shared their successes on social media, while others complained of attempting to book appointments online, only to get an error message informing them that "the form has been tampered with."

Sue Gowanz, a Toronto resident hoping to book an appointment for an elderly relative, said she received the error message.

She then called the phone line for the portal, where she was transferred to the booking system for the Niagara Public Health Unit. After waiting for someone to pick up, she was then told they couldn't book an appointment further.

"This has escalated to ridiculous," Gowanz wrote in a message to CBC Toronto.

In a statement, the Eastern Ontario Health Unit said it has been told by the province that some clinic locations have yet to be entered into the system.

"If someone gets a message saying 'Form has been tampered with,' this is a technical problem that the province is working to resolve as quickly as possible," the statement

reads.

Only try to book an appointment if you're eligible, province warns

Ford said Sunday it's crucial that only eligible residents make use of the system. For now, that group consists solely of those 80 and older.

While many of Ontario's 34 public health units have already established their own systems for booking vaccination appointments, the provincial portal will now either enhance or fully replace those setups in many areas.

In addition to allowing vaccine-seekers to book their shots, the portal also provides instructions on how to schedule appointments based on protocols in place in each specific health unit.

The province said people who are eligible to get vaccinated can book online here, while those wishing to schedule by phone can call 1-888-999-6488.

First and second vaccination appointments will be arranged at the same time, the government said, noting people will be asked to provide their provincial health card details, birth date, postal code and email address or phone number.

Ford said the booking system will be open to other age groups in April as part of the next phase of Ontario's vaccination rollout.

"Everyone will have their chance to get vaccinated, but we're prioritizing our most vulnerable," he said.

Vaccines rolling out at quarter of Ontario's capacity, Ford

The launch of the provincial portal marks the latest step in Ontario's mass immunization drive, which introduced new elements targeting some 60- to 64-year-olds in recent days.

A pilot project allowing pharmacies to administer shots launched last week in the Toronto, Windsor-Essex and Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington health units.

Family doctors in six other public health units - Toronto, Peel, Hamilton, Guelph, Peterborough and Simcoe-Muskoka - also began delivering vaccines to eligible patients in the same age bracket as of Sunday.

Both pilot projects will see eligible residents receive shots of the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine.

## Head of Ontario's vaccine task force set to leave as province's vaccine booking system launches

Ontario has the resources to administer 4.8 million vaccines per month, said Ford, but the rollout is running at about a quarter of that capacity because of limited supply. He said the province needs more vaccine.

"The infrastructure is in place, and I can tell you folks we are ready," he said.

According to the ministry, health units across Ontario administered 33,198 vaccines yesterday. A total of 287,283 people in Ontario have now been given both shots of a vaccine.

9 eight-day days of more than 1,900 new cases

This is the ninth straight day Ontario has reported more than 1,900 new COVID-19 cases. The seven-day average now stands at 1,350.

Monday's new cases include 166 in Toronto, 220 in Peel Region and 147 in York Region.

The Ontario Hospital Association said Monday in a statement that Ontario is now in the midst of a third wave of the virus, citing data from the province's Science Advisory Table.

Provincial Health Officer of Health Dr. David Williams said at a press conference Monday that Ontario could be in a "slight undulation" or a "smaller wave," but the province is monitoring the situation.

"You can always tell when you're in a trough or over," Williams said.

The province also said Monday COVID-19 has been linked to nine additional deaths.

Officials say 699 people are being treated in hospital for COVID-19, an increase of 88 from Saturday.

Of the patients currently in hospital, 298 are in intensive-care units. However, data provided by Critical Care Services Ontario, which provides a more up-to-date look at critical care data, shows there are now 349 people in intensive care.

Other public health units that saw double-digit increases in cases were:



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# Rogers' \$26B plan to buy Calgary-based Shaw would create Canada's 2nd-biggest telecom

Rogers Communications has signed a deal to buy Shaw Communications in a transaction valued at \$26 billion, including debt, which would create Canada's No. 2 cellular and cable operator - but is likely to face regulatory scrutiny.

Under the plan, Rogers will pay \$40.50 in cash for each of Shaw's issued and outstanding class A and class B shares. Shaw shares jumped 42 per cent to \$34 on Monday, but traded well below the offer price, suggesting doubts about the deal. Shares of Rogers were also up seven percent at \$64.



By acquiring fourth-ranked Shaw, Rogers would top post-merger No. 2 Telus to take on market leader BCE Inc., the publicly traded holding company for the Bell Canada group of companies. It would also be the biggest deal in Canadian telecom history since BCE completed the \$10.5-billion takeover of Nortel Networks in a transaction valued at \$48.7 billion in 2006, according to Refinitiv.

S&P/TSX composite index was up 19.76 points at 18,871.08. Subject to approval, review of the deal, which requires shareholder approval, is subject to other customary closing conditions, as well as approvals from Canadian regulators. It is expected to close in the first half of 2022.

The deal will face review by the Independent Competition Bureau of Canada, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), as well as the federal department of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development (ISED).

Canadian Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne said in a statement that the review would focus on "affordability, competition, and innovation."

"Shaw was always seen as a solid fourth player in Canada. When you're talking about taking out that fourth player, I do see that there are some regulatory risks for this," said Stephen Dunlop, portfolio manager at AIG Investments, whose firm owns shares in both companies.

# Canada-U.S. border has been shut down for a year - and there's no reopening plan

The one-year anniversary of the quiet shutdown of the Canada-U.S. border will come and go next week, with no end in sight to disruptions that have affected lives, businesses, and communities touching the world's so-called longest undefended frontier.

Once again, the tightening will be extended on March 21 for another year as it has every month since the pandemic crashed onto this continent last year.



Once again, the people most affected will wonder what the plan is for reopening and what sorts of public-health standards would allow regularized travel.

The truth is there is no plan. Conversations with officials in both countries in recent days revealed that, even as vaccinations ramp up, neither government has defined what it will take to open the border.

They say there's an secret document laying out such benchmarks - such as, for example, the number of vaccine doses required for a return to normal, or the number of cases in a region.

The official line remains that it's still too soon to talk about reopening because the virus remains a serious threat. There are still too few vaccinated people, case levels are still concerning, virus variants pose unknown risks.

One leader of the initiative is Brian Higgins, a Democratic member of the House of Representatives from Buffalo, N.Y.

In an interview last week in his office, Higgins reflected on the time between countries. He pointed to an acoustic guitar in his office and noted that he'd just been playing a Gordon Lightfoot tune, he mentioned about how easy it used to be, in the old days, before the border tightened with the Sept. 11 attacks, to drive across to Ontario, park his car, and go for a jog along the riverfront.

U.S. lawmakers were barely partly reopened by May 1, under certain health-related conditions.

"I don't see any reason why loved ones who have been separated for a year; property owners; people that live in Buffalo that own a cottage in Crystal Beach, Ont., business owners - why shouldn't they be able to cross the border safely," he said.

"So long as they certify that they're going to do certain things: certify that you've been vaccinated, certify that you're going to wear a mask, certify that you're going to practice good physical distancing."

Higgins has been talking to the Biden administration as it works on its own policy as part of an executive order signed on the president's first birthday in office.

The White House policy is weeks behind schedule. However, Higgins hopes the new administration might be able to dump up some ideas soon and propose them to Canada.

Canadian officials aren't actually rejecting the notion of a phased

to talk went unmentioned, so did a letter sent five weeks ago.

"That's very frustrating," Volpe said last Monday.

The association can meet with the prime minister, deputy prime minister, Mexican cabinet members and White House officials but can't reach Blair, he said.

"I can get a hold of the White House - but not Public Safety... [B]iden."

Days later, following a request for comment from CBC News, Blair's office said the minister and his representatives had just spoken with auto-industry figures in recent days; Volpe confirmed Blair had recently reached out.

Volpe said the government has a responsibility to shed some light on its longer-term plan: "Show us the road map, just like the provinces get a road map on how they go from road to highway to freeway."

This is what some U.S. lawmakers, including Higgins, tried pushing for last year: clarity on how a phased-reopening would work.

But the idea was rebuffed and Higgins' social-media feed was inundated with ridicule from a number of Canadians. Higgins now says he doesn't blame Canadians for that reaction.

At the time, the U.S. was in the midst of a devastating second wave of COVID-19 cases, and the country's COVID-19 death rate is still nearly three times higher than Canada's.

He blames the former Trump administration for not taking the virus seriously enough and for not engaging Canada.

American outlook brightening fast. Now the tide is turning.

Vaccination rates are surging in the U.S. Biden has said he expects enough vaccines for every American by May 31 and hopes life might be closer to normal by Independence Day, July 4.

This year has been particularly damp in border communities.

In Massena, N.Y., across from Cornwall, Ont., the town supervisor said the absence of Canadians has been felt in places like the nearby Malone, N.Y., ski resort.

"No Canadian traffic - it hurts a lot," Steven O'Shaughnessy said.

He said people in his community just keep hearing - month after month - about shutdown extensions, but never about the longer-term plan.

Border communities anxiously await news.

Across the border, the mayor of Cornwall referred to the human impact, recounting the story of one woman across the border who struggled to watch her dying mother in Cornwall.

# AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines under investigation 'not shipped to Canada,' officials say

Canada has not received any AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines that were part of the batch under investigation for blood clots, Health Canada confirmed Sunday.

The agency said it had been informed by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) that "several countries in Europe have either temporarily paused the use of specific batches of the AstraZeneca vaccine or use of the AstraZeneca vaccine altogether as a precautionary measure, pending the outcome of the EMA's investigation," in an emailed statement to Global News Sunday.

However, Health Canada noted "none of the identified batches under investigation have been shipped to Canada."

"To date, no adverse events related to the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, or the version manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, have been reported to Health Canada or the Public Health Agency of Canada,"



The review covered more than 17 million people vaccinated in the AstraZeneca vaccine in the European Union and United Kingdom.

"A careful review of all available safety data of more than 17 million people vaccinated in the European Union and UK with COVID-19 vaccine AstraZeneca has shown no evidence of an increased risk of pulmonary embolism, deep vein

thrombosis, or thrombocytopenia, in any defined age group, gender, batch or in any particular country," the statement said.

AstraZeneca's comments echoed that of Health Canada, who told Global News that it would continue to monitor the vaccine's safety in Canada despite the suspensions.

The agency said the benefits of the vaccine "continue to outweigh the risks" and that it still "meets Canada's stringent safety, efficacy and quality requirements."

Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and other European countries have temporarily suspended their use after reports some recipients formed blood clots after vaccination.

Ireland's deputy chief medical officer said Sunday the country had recommended the suspension of the vaccine's use "as an abundance of caution" pending further investigation. Similarly, Denmark's decision to suspend the vaccine on Thursday was based on a "precautionary principle."

In the AstraZeneca vaccine used for Canadians? Doctor answers our COVID-19 queries.

One person who developed a blood clot after vaccination died 10 days later, though health officials increased their caution to an increased risk of pulmonary embolism, deep vein

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