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## Brampton, Ont., teen among youngest Canadians to die with COVID-19

A teenage girl in Brampton, Ont., is among the youngest Canadians to die with COVID-19 after her family said she contracted the coronavirus amid the province's devastating third wave.

Emily Victoria Viegas, 13, died on April 22, according to an online fundraiser launched in her memory that raised more than \$80,000 for her grieving family.

Family friend Adrian Goddard, who organized the fundraiser, told CBC News that Viegas had contracted COVID-19 as well as pneumonia. Her mother is currently in intensive care with COVID-19, Goddard said, while her younger brother is also infected and in isolation, but doing OK.

Dr. Andrew Henley, William Osler Health System's interim corporate chief of emergency medicine, said Monday afternoon that this is the first person under the age of 19 who has died in their health system.

"We extend our deepest condolences to her family, and our thoughts are with them at this incredibly difficult time," he said.

Henley, who is also chair of the health system's COVID clinical response committee, said he couldn't speak to if Viegas had any pre-existing health conditions. He did note, however, that in the last 24 hours, he has admitted five people with COVID-19 to the intensive care unit, and that three of those people had no pre-existing health conditions.

Dr. Dirk Hoyer, Ontario's chief coroner, confirmed Monday that the province is investigating the teen's



death.

"What a tragedy," he said. "My heart goes out to the family and all of those that knew her. And we're really trying to understand the circumstances more closely."

Speaking with CBC Radio's Metro Morning, Hoyer said it's unclear if Viegas was sickened by one of the commoner variants of concern, which have been found to be more transmissible and more likely to cause serious illness and death.

Variant of concern now account for a considerable majority of new infections driving the third wave of the pandemic in Ontario.

Many emergency physicians and critical care nurses have said that, anecdotally, the demographics of patients sick with COVID-19 being admitted to ICUs has skewed younger during the third wave.

Dr. Kati Barrett, a critical care physician at University Health Network in Toronto, told CBC News last week that ICUs are increasingly filled with essential workers and their

family members.

Even so, severe illness and death from COVID-19 among the youngest Canadians has been exceedingly rare.

According to national statistics, of the 208,195 people aged 19 and under who have been infected, 955 were admitted to hospital. Of those, 142 were hospitalized in intensive care.

Eight Canadians 19 and under have died with the disease, including three in Ontario.

Death "truly heartbreaking," leaders say

A spokesperson confirmed that Viegas was a student in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB).

"This is a loss to the entire DPCDSB community. At this time, we are focusing on supporting staff and students and respecting the privacy of the grieving family," the board said in a email.

In a statement released Monday morning, Premier Doug Ford said his "heart absolutely breaks for this family."

"I can't imagine the unbearable pain and sorrow they are feeling right now," Ford said. "It's heart-wrenching and a devastating reminder of what this virus can do. On behalf of all Ontarians, I'm sending my deepest condolences to everyone who is suffering from the terrible loss of this young life."

Across Peel Region, which has been especially hard hit throughout the pandemic, the girl's death came as a setback to political leaders.

## Coronavirus: What's happening in Canada and around the world on Monday

Ontario has made a formal request to the Canadian Armed Forces to help deal with a surge in critical care cases associated with COVID-19's third wave, just days after it rebuffed an offer by the federal government to send in extra personnel.

In a statement Monday, a spokesperson for Solicitor General Sylvia Jones said the province has "made a request for the assistance of those identified resources, many of whom reside, for example, within the Canadian Armed Forces and Canadian Red Cross organizations."

"In addition to health human resources, we are requesting logistical and operational support as we seek to augment our response to COVID-19," the statement from Jones's press secretary Stephen Waters said.

The province reported 3,510 new cases of COVID-19 and 24 additional deaths on Monday. As well, Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott confirmed that nine health-care professionals from Newfoundland and Labrador would arrive in the province on Tuesday - including Premier Andrew Faure's wife, Dr. Alison Fury.

Manitoba, meanwhile, announced a series of new restrictions in order to curb the spread of COVID-19, including a ban on private indoor and outdoor gatherings over the next four weeks.

Other restrictions that take effect Wednesday at 12:01 a.m. include a 25 per cent capacity limit on retail stores as well as at cultural and religious gatherings, patio dining limited to groups of four and the closure of food courts in the province.

"Please stay home as much as possible," Dr. Brent Russell, the province's chief public health officer, said at a news conference. Manitoba also reported 210 new cases of COVID-19 and one death linked to a more contagious coronavirus variant on Monday.

Nova Scotia, which recently tightened up restrictions and boosted fines for violations, reported 66 new cases of COVID-19 - a new high for the province. "Premier Iain Rankin said it's back and it wants to stay," Premier Iain Rankin said in a briefing Monday.

The province announced Monday that all schools in the Halifax area will transition to at-home learning this week. Dr. Robert Strang, Nova Scotia's chief medical officer of health, said the school closures were needed due to "significant impacts" on the Halifax-area education system caused by the amount of virus activity in the schools, as well as high numbers of staff needed to isolate while awaiting test results or due to being a close contact of an infected person.

What's happening around Canada

As of 4 p.m. ET on Monday, Canada had reported 1,183,938 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 85,334 considered active. A CBC News tally of deaths stood at 23,999.

Nova Scotia on Monday reported 66 new cases of COVID-19 - a new high for the province, which recently tightened up restrictions and boosted fines for violations. Premier Iain Rankin and Dr. Robert Strang, the province's chief medical officer of health, are expected to provide a briefing later in the day.

Quebec health officials reported 889 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday and eight additional deaths. Manitoba also reported 210 new cases of COVID-19 and one death linked to a more contagious coronavirus variant on Monday.

New Brunswick reported seven new

cases of COVID-19 Monday. Dr. Jennifer Russell, the province's chief medical officer of health, also confirmed that a previously reported case was of the coronavirus variant first detected in India.

Newfoundland and Labrador reported four new cases of COVID-19 on Monday. Health officials said the new cases involve travel within Canada.

Saskatchewan reported 245 new cases of COVID-19 and one related death on Monday.

In Alberta, council in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo - which includes the Fort McMurray area - passed a motion to declare a local state of emergency amid rising case numbers "to support efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19."

Students from elementary through to high school in Fort McMurray are moving online, with students set to return to the classroom on May 10, officials said.

Nasaval on Monday reported nine new cases of COVID-19. Dr. Michael Patterson, the territory's chief public health officer, confirmed that some of



the Nunavut's active cases are of the B.117 coronavirus variant.

In British Columbia, health officials will provide updated figures covering the weekend later Monday.

What's happening around the world

As of Monday afternoon, more than 147 million cases of COVID-19 had been reported worldwide, according to Johns Hopkins University. The reported global death toll stood at more than 3.1 million.

The situation in India, where COVID-19 cases have surged, is "beyond heartbreaking," and the World Health Organization is sending extra staff and supplies there to help fight the pandemic. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Monday.

"WHO is doing everything we can, providing critical equipment and supplies, including thousands of oxygen concentrators, prefabricated mobile field hospitals and laboratory supplies," he told in a briefing.

In the Asia-Pacific region, confirmed coronavirus infections in the Philippines surged past one million on Monday in the country's

latest grim milestone, as officials assess whether to extend a smothering lockdown in the Manila region amid a deadly spike or relax it to fight an economic recession, joblessness and hunger.

Pakistani authorities, meanwhile, are racing against time to add more beds and ventilators at hospitals amid a surge in deaths and coronavirus infections. Authorities have started screening tourists to ensure people don't violate physical distancing rules, according to Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad. Pakistan said it will be forced to impose a nationwide lockdown if the COVID-19 situation does not improve this week.

In Europe, Germany's coronavirus infection rate rose at the weekend despite stricter restrictions and Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said he did not expect moves to ease curbs before the end of May.

Much of Italy is reopening after weeks of strict coronavirus lockdowns, with museums welcoming the public and bars and restaurants open for outdoor, sit-down service.

Despite appeals for physical distancing, public transport in Rome and Milan was jammed as high schools were allowed to operate at least 70 per cent in-person learning starting Monday.

In the Americas, Mexico's top diplomat travelled to Moscow on Sunday for a visit with Russian officials, his office said, amid talks to hammer out plans for Mexico to bottle Russian Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine domestically after delays in shipments.

In Africa, South African researchers will on Wednesday resume a study further evaluating the efficacy of Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine in the field, after it was temporarily suspended along with use of the shot in the United States.

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## Ontario keeping AstraZeneca shots to those aged 40+ for now due to supply issues

TORONTO -- Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott's office said Friday that the province will continue to administer AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to those 40 years of age and older, despite an updated recommendation from Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) that it now be offered to those 16 and over.

A spokesperson for Elliott's office said in a statement that while Ontario welcomes the recommendation to lower the age threshold, there is not currently sufficient supply to expand eligibility.

"With approximately 337,000 doses remaining and future shipments not expected until May, we will continue to administer AstraZeneca to individuals 40 and over in pharmacies and primary care settings until we receive additional supply," the statement read. "This is aligned with



Ontario's vaccine rollout which prioritizes age 40+.

where it was slated to provide the update.

The committee had previously advised giving the shots to those 55 and older as it evaluated evidence of a link to rare blood clots which had mostly occurred in younger people.

Also on Friday, Ontario reported its first case of a rare blood clot associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine, in a man in his 60s. However health officials maintain that the chance of getting a clot from the vaccine is very low.

Ontario expanded use of the shot to those 40 years of age and older earlier this week and has seen its daily vaccination numbers leap ahead since doing so.

The vaccine is being distributed in Ontario through pharmacies and doctors' offices and appointments to get the shots have been snatched up quickly as they become available.

To date, Ontario has received 900,400 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from various sources.

The federal government has said that 4.1 million more doses of the vaccine are expected to arrive in the country by the end of June, but a delivery schedule to the provinces has not yet been published.

## Ontario requests help from Canadian Armed Forces as critical care COVID-19 cases surge

3,519 new cases of critical care admissions to ICUs climbed to 877, another pandemic high in Ontario.

Ontario has made a formal request to the Canadian Armed Forces for help in dealing with a surge in critical care cases associated with COVID-19, just days after it rebuffed an offer by the federal government to send in contingents.

In a statement Monday, a spokesperson for Solicitor General Sylvia Jones said the province has "made a request for the assistance of these identified resources, many of whom reside, for example, within the Canadian Armed Forces and Canadian Red Cross organizations."

"In addition to health human resources, we are requesting logistical and operational support as we seek to augment our response to COVID-19," the statement from Jones's press secretary Stephen Winters said.

Speaking to reporters, Jones said the request, made Friday, did not request a specific number of personnel.

"What we are looking for is very specialized resources that can help out in our intensive care unit beds and medical personnel that can assist our hospitals that are seeing disturbing rises in cases of COVID-19," she said.

Sunnybrook puts first patient in field hospital

Meanwhile, the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre is, for the first time, putting patients in its field hospital. The centre reported its first patient Monday. A total of 10 beds have been made available there so far to help ease pressure in main-campus hospitals.

Ontario also reported a third case of a rare blood clotting condition known as vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT), this time in a man in his 70s currently in hospital after receiving the Covishield vaccine, a version of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The news comes as Ontario reported another 3,519 cases of COVID-19 on Monday, while the number of patients with the illness who need a ventilator to breathe approached 1,000.

According to the Ministry of Health, 877 people with COVID-19 are being treated in intensive care units across the province, twice as many as there were at the beginning



Several vaccine shipments expected this week.

of the B.1.1.7 variant first identified in India, but concerns remain about the efficacy of quarantine rules and about what counts as essential travel.

Only about two per cent of COVID-19 cases in Canada are currently associated with travel, but Yaffe pointed out that with variants of concern now accounting for the majority of Ontario's cases, that percentage "doesn't represent the burden of illness that's associated with international travel."

"I don't think that the system, in my mind, is as solid as it should be," Williams added.

Several vaccine shipments expected this week.

Sunday's low testing number was accompanied by a considerable drop in vaccinations.

Public health units collectively administered just 69,308 doses of COVID-19 vaccines, the Ministry of Health said - far below the minimum target of at least 100,000 per day and less than half of Ontario's 150,000 per day goal.

Ontario has used 4,696,211, or about 89 per cent, of the 5,248,345 doses that has received to date. Slightly less than 30 per cent of the province's total population has had at least one dose of vaccine.

Health officials are expecting several significant shipments this week: 396,630 doses of the Pfizer vaccine and 116,700 doses of the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. A delivery of 350,000 AstraZeneca doses that were scheduled to land last week has still not arrived, and it is unclear when it will.

The CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) told CBC News he anticipates the some 1,400 pharmacies administering the AstraZeneca vaccine to run out of doses within seven to 10 days.

Justin Bates said there will likely be a lull in the availability of vaccines through participating pharmacies as doses dwindle. The OPA is discussing a potential pilot project with the health ministry that would see some pharmacies offer Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

Select locations in designated hot spots could begin offering the vaccines as early as this week, Bates said.

"It will allow us to get all the distribution and logistics down and then have a headstart," he said.

Late last week, Ontario's COVID-19 science advisory table recommended that the province review its vaccine rollout plan to target up to 50 per cent of available vaccine doses to 74 hot spot postal codes. The current strategy allows for 25 per cent of total doses to go to 114 designated hotspots.

## Pfizer pilot project could hit Toronto, Peel pharmacies this week

A second COVID-19 vaccine could soon be an option at select Ontario pharmacies.

680 NEWS has learned that a pilot project is in the works that would make the Pfizer shot available at certain locations, potentially as early as this week.

Justin Bates, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists Association, says pharmacies are working with the Ford government on the project that would get the Pfizer vaccine to hotspot pharmacies.

Bates says the initial rollout would just be at locations in Toronto and Peel hotspots and says he is hopeful it will be implemented this week.

"It would be a very limited rollout for the first two weeks," says Bates. "We would roll out from there into other hotspots and then more broadly across the province."

Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott says Peel Region currently has 25 COVID-19 hotspots and will be receiving additional vaccines as early next week once the province secures additional supply.

Elliott says the government is considering giving hotspots, such as Toronto and Peel, 50 percent of vaccines as recommended last week by Ontario's Science Table with a decision expected soon.

Adding the Pfizer shot to pharmacies would require some additional planning surrounding cold storage, but Bates says pharmacies have the capabilities to manage the vaccine. Unlike AstraZeneca, the Pfizer vaccine needs to be kept frozen.

"When it's thawed it's good for up to five days in a fridge," says Bates. "You just manage your bookings and inventory accordingly."

No word yet on who would be eligible for the shots.

Bates says the demand for the AstraZeneca shot continues to exceed the supply since age limits were lowered last week. He anticipates the province's current stock will run out sometime this week with a potential supply interruption on the horizon.

"We're getting inundated by calls and bookings for the AstraZeneca shot ever since it went down to 40 plus," says Bates.

Canada is not expecting any additional AstraZeneca doses this week.

Federal Public Procurement Minister Anita Anand said last week that Canada is in talks with the U.S. for some of its AstraZeneca supply after President Joe Biden suggested it

might share the shots.


The U.S. has stockpiled tens of millions of AstraZeneca shots, but health officials there have not approved the vaccine for use.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has recommended provinces administer the AstraZeneca vaccine to adults aged 50 years old and older but the province says they're not quite ready to lower the age.

NACI doctors emphasized that each province and region will set its own policy on vaccination.

A spokesperson for Ontario's Ministry of Health said in a statement they will continue to give the vaccine to people aged 40 and above.

"With approximately 337,000 doses remaining and future shipments not expected until May, we will continue to administer AstraZeneca to individuals 40 and over in pharmacies and primary care settings until we receive an additional supply," they said.



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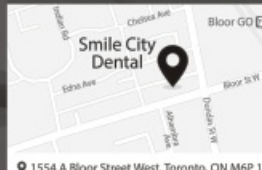
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## Select Ontario Pharmacies Offering 24/7 COVID-19 Vaccinations

Province Increasing Access to COVID-19 Vaccines in Support of At-Risk Communities

TORONTO - The Ontario government, in collaboration with Shoppers Drug Mart, will offer 24/7 COVID-19 vaccinations for individuals aged 40 and over at 20 pharmacy locations, with the majority located in hot spot communities.

As early as tomorrow, April 21, 2021, 20 Shoppers Drug Mart locations, including 16 in the hot-spot communities of Toronto, Peel and York Region, will begin offering the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine 24/7 to individuals aged 40 and over. When the province begins to receive more vaccine supply from the federal government, it will expand 24/7 COVID-19 vaccinations to additional hot spots.

Additionally, the province is now

enabling pharmacies to offer walk-in services. Ontarians should contact participating pharmacies to inquire as to whether they are offering vaccines by appointment, on a walk-in basis or both.

The province is continually expanding the pharmacy locations available to administer COVID-19 vaccines. Last week more than 700 pharmacies came on board across the province, bringing the total to over 1,400 locations. All eligible individuals can find a local pharmacy location offering vaccines through Ontario.ca/pharmacyservices. In addition, many primary care providers are directly contacting eligible patients to book an appointment.

"Working with our pharmacy partners, we are ensuring communities who are most at risk are able to access COVID-19 vaccines conveniently, close to home and

around the clock," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "Vaccines remain the best way to protect your health and the health of those around you, and I encourage everyone to sign up when it's your turn."

To help increase access to vaccines for those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacies in hot spot communities will receive additional doses of the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine.

This is part of the government's commitment to dedicate 25 per cent of future vaccine allocations to hot spot communities across the 13 public health unit regions, targeting mobile teams, pop-up clinics, mass immunization clinics, hospitals and pharmacies.

As Ontario continues to ramp up capacity and expand the rollout to additional age groups and locations,

the greatest challenge to Ontario's vaccine rollout remains a stable and reliable supply of vaccines. For example, the upcoming shipment of Moderna that was due to be received on April 19 is now delayed until the end of April or the first week of May. In addition, this shipment is being reduced from 448,400 to 235,700 doses. An additional shipment of AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine, estimated to be approximately 389,000 doses was expected mid-April, and will now be delayed to the end of May. The Ontario government continues to explore all options to secure more vaccines and avoid a severe impact on the province's rollout.

"Increasing access to vaccines will limit the spread of COVID-19 and help protect the health and well-being of our families, friends and communities," said Solicitor General Sylvia Jones. "Everyone has a role to play when it comes to emergency response, and getting vaccinated is one more way people can make a real difference in stopping the spread of this deadly virus."

"The real answer" is to keep your distance, not socialize with others and get vaccinated as soon as you're eligible, the mayor said.

"I mean, there is no other answer we have at the moment to what is just an insupportable tragedy."

More than 500 deaths this month

Ontario reported 4,094 new cases of COVID-19 on Saturday and another 24 deaths as the number of patients in intensive care rose and on ventilators reached new highs. There are 2,277 patients hospitalized, with 833 in intensive care and 782 on ventilators.

Deaths have accelerated this month, with 520 Ontarians dying of COVID-19 so far in April compared with 386 in March. But the daily death counts have not returned to the level seen in January and February, when more than 50 deaths were regularly reported on single days.

Ontario, however, did reach a third-wave high of 40 deaths reported on a single day on Thursday.

A total of 7,847 people in the province have died since the pandemic began. Two were 19 years old or younger, 47 were between the ages of 20 and 39 and 365 were between 40 and 59, according to Public Health Ontario's most recent report.

"It's not that people were ignoring symptoms... They were people who did have a stable condition and then deteriorated very quickly in their unfortunate deaths," he told reporters.

It's too early to say whether this is happening because of new variants of the virus that are more transmissible and can cause more severe illness, Hoyer told CBC News.

He said he shared the information, "so that people understand the seriousness of what we're dealing with."

"The numbers of cases we have right now is the highest we've ever had in Ontario... The more people that are infected, the more people will suffer serious illness, the more people that will die."

Toronto Mayor John Tory said the situation illuminates how important it is to get tested and see a doctor, "as opposed to hoping that it's just the sniffles."

"Whether you die in the hospital or die at home, you're dying at a young age from an illness that takes people... very quickly," Tory told CBC's Metro Morning.

## Canada imposes ban on passenger flights from India, Pakistan for 30 days

OTTAWA -- The federal government is imposing a 30-day ban on all commercial and private flights from India and Pakistan effective Thursday at 11:30 p.m. EST, as COVID-19 infections continue to surge in those countries.

Ministers of health, immigration, transport, public safety, and international affairs delivered the update in a joint press conference Thursday evening, as the government faces pressure to curb variant spread domestically.

Transport Minister Omar Alghamdi said they are imposing the temporary ban as more passengers arrive in Canada with positive test results from those countries.

"Given the higher number of cases of COVID-19 detected in air passengers arriving in Canada from India and Pakistan, Transport Canada is issuing a notice to airlines, or OTAs, to halt direct passenger air traffic from those countries," said Alghamdi.

Additionally, if travellers departing from those two countries take an indirect route home, they'll be required to show a negative PCR test at their last point of departure. Once they arrive in Canada, they'll follow the standard protocols, unless exempt, including taking another test and booking a stay at a designated government hotel while they await their results.

Alghamdi said the government won't hesitate to ban flights from other countries as the science evolves.

He also insisted that Canadians avoid falling into the trap of blaming an identifiable group for causing COVID-19. "We've seen this with Asian Canadians, we must reject scapegoating. This virus is not Chinese, nor is it Indian, it affects us all."

Health Minister Penny Priddy said the temporary ban will allow Canada's public health experts to collect more data about the epidemiology of the virus.

"I want to say that our hearts are with the citizens of India, Pakistan, indeed the whole region during these incredibly difficult times. In the meantime, we'll continue to apply stringent testing and quarantine measures for all passengers arriving in Canada," she said.

India recorded the highest one-day tally of new COVID-19 cases in the world with more than 314,000 new infections reported on Thursday. The



country, which is the second-most populous in the world, also reported 2,104 new deaths related to the virus, which is its highest in a 24-hour period. In total, India has had more than 15.9 million COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began - the second-highest amount after the United States.

The mounting cases have resulted in acute shortages of beds and medicine and low oxygen supply in a large number of hospitals, India's health ministry said. In response, the government has been making oxygen tankers to replenish hospital supplies. There are also reports of overwhelmed crematoriums and morgues with bodies piling up outside on sidewalks.

There were 35 flights from India with at least one COVID-19 case on board that arrived in Canada in the last two weeks, according to the government.

In a letter addressed to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau earlier Thursday, Premier Devraj Puri and health minister Francois Legault called on the federal government to reduce the number of international flights arriving in Canada and impose greater restrictions at the Canada-U.S. land border.

"We are concerned about the growing number of cases attributed to variants, which arrived in Canada through international travel. We are writing to you to request that the federal government take further measures to limit the spread of the virus," the letter reads.

Of the variants of concern, Canada is reporting 73,150 cases of the B.1.1.7 variant, first discovered in the U.K., 2,487 cases of the P.1 variant, first linked to Brazil, and 435 cases of the B.1.351 variant, associated with South Africa.

On Wednesday, Quebec reported the first case of the B.1.617 variant, which was first identified in India and

is considered at the moment a variant of interest.

Federal MPs also showed unanimous support on Thursday for Bill C-283, which would suspend non-essential passenger flights from countries with high rates of COVID-19 variants.

Earlier in the day, Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole held a press conference about the ban.

"Throughout April, dozens of COVID-positive flights have been landing in Canada. With them, they brought the risk of new variants, including the double mutated variant that is currently overwhelming India's health-care system," O'Toole said. "We have a small window of opportunity to act, and we must move now."

On Wednesday, Canada's chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam said country-specific travel restrictions "can only go so far" when it comes to preventing the spread of highly contagious variants.

"The virus globally is undergoing evolution and there are many different mutations and changes in the virus, particularly in countries that have a lot of cases," she said during a press conference Wednesday. "Given that situation, a strategy for Canada was to add more layers of protections for every country."

Deputy chief public health officer Dr. Howard Njoo said it's next to impossible to stop the spread of the virus through border restrictions alone.

"Borders are artificial, you would need to think of natural barriers like oceans or mountains, but here in Canada we have flights coming in, we also have the land border so it's not easy, but with the measures we've taken at the border like testing, we are able to monitor and detect the emergency variants," he said.

He also said Canadians abroad

"have the right to come home" but reinforced public health's recommendation to avoid non-essential international travel.

Last week, the Public Health Agency of Canada dropped its recommendation for additional screening measures for travellers arriving in Canada from Brazil because there wasn't clear evidence that additional questioning protocols were adding "operational value" and the P.1 variant associated with Brazil was already on the rise in Western Canada.

MORE EXPERTS WEIGH IN

Kelley Lee, the Canada Research Chair in global health governance at Simon Fraser University and member of Pandemics & Borders, an international research group providing data on border control measures, says country-specific travel bans or restrictions shouldn't be the only mechanisms being considered to mitigate variant spread.

"Everyone is panicking over India and saying 'oh, we got to stop the flights from India,' and I'm saying 'oh, we got to stop the flights from Mexico and a few Caribbean countries. That is a poor way of looking at it for a number of reasons, because the variants are out there, people are travelling continuously, passing through different airports," she said in an interview with CTVNews.ca.

"That variant is not just in India now, it could be anywhere."

She said instead, Canada should look at a package of measures, including "gold standard" testing and quarantining, and applying that package to everyone that comes in, not just to those by air.

"Variants don't care if you're travelling for essential or non-essential reasons, they are just moving. So I would say you first have to be very, very stringent about who is not subject to these kind of measures and vaccinate them - flight crews, crew on ships, truck drivers, people that couldn't do their jobs if they had to quarantine every time they crossed the border."

The Manitoba government and the state of North Dakota are working together on a joint initiative to help essential workers get vaccinated as they cross back and forth from the two regions on regular basis.

Lee said there are two options to improve Canada's quarantine system, to either increase the mandatory hotel stay to 14 days in line with countries like Australia and New Zealand or to use community surveillance methods to allow people to quarantine at home rather than in a facility.

## More COVID-19 patients dying at home, Ontario coroner says

Some COVID-19 patients are now becoming so ill so quickly that they die before seeking medical attention, Ontario's chief coroner said.

At least 25 people have died in their homes rather than in hospitals or nursing homes since April 1, Dr. Dirk Hoyer told CBC News on Friday. There could be more cases that his office is unaware of, he added.

The new reality is a deviation from earlier waves of the pandemic, when most COVID-19 deaths took place in nursing homes and hospitals. It indicates how dangerous the current wave is in Ontario, Hoyer said.

He said he was particularly troubled that some of the people who have died at home were in their 30s, 40s and 50s.

"That is not what we saw in the earlier waves. It was not common for younger people to die. So absolutely, this is concerning."

Hoyer first mentioned the "unfortunate and sad" phenomenon at a news conference at Ontario's legislature building on Thursday.



"It's not that people were ignoring symptoms... They were people who did have a stable condition and then deteriorated very quickly in their unfortunate deaths," he told reporters.

It's too early to say whether this is happening because of new variants of the virus that are more transmissible and can cause more severe illness, Hoyer told CBC News.

He said he shared the information, "so that people understand the seriousness of what we're dealing with."

"The numbers of cases we have right now is the highest we've ever had in Ontario... The more people that are infected, the more people will suffer serious illness, the more people that will die."

Toronto Mayor John Tory said the situation illuminates how important it is to get tested and see a doctor, "as opposed to hoping that it's just the sniffles."

"Whether you die in the hospital or die at home, you're dying at a young age from an illness that takes people... very quickly," Tory told CBC's Metro Morning.



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