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Canada to receive 2M vaccine doses this week as Pfizer-BioNTech ramp up deliveries

OTTAWA - Canada is set to begin receiving more than two million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine each week as the pharmaceutical firms ramp up their deliveries and begin shipping shots from the United States.

OTTAWA - Canada is set to begin receiving more than two million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine each week as the pharmaceutical firms ramp up their deliveries and begin shipping shots from the United States.

Pfizer and BioNTech have been consistently delivering around one million doses from Brussels each week since mid-March, but those numbers will double over the next month before increasing further in June.

This week's doses will also be the first to arrive from Pfizer's plant in Kalamazoo, Mich., after the U.S. government previously restricted vaccine exports to inoculate its own citizens.

There was no immediate word, however, on progress in talks with the U.S. over the provision of more doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which is in high demand across the country.

Federal Public Service and Procurement Minister Anita Anand said on Friday that Ottawa was "being very aggressive, especially with the supplier."

U.S. President Joe Biden suggested last month that the U.S. could share its stockpile of tens of millions of



AstraZeneca shots, which health officials there have not approved for use.

Demand for the shot has skyrocketed after several provinces dropped the eligible age for the vaccine to 40-plus, and Anand has said Canada will receive four million total doses by the end of June, but the government does not have a detailed schedule of when they will actually arrive.

The Pfizer-BioNTech doses are the only shots scheduled for arrival in Canada over the next seven days, with Moderna slated to deliver its next shipment of more than one million doses next week.

The data also haven't said when they will release doses of the single-shot vaccine from Johnson and Johnson, after the first 300,000 jobs arrived in Canada last week.

Plans to distribute them are now on hold after Health Canada learned some of them were manufactured at a Maryland facility that booted part of the production process for 15 million

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization says the Johnson & Johnson vaccine should be limited to people over the age of 30 who don't want to wait for BioNTech-Pfizer or Moderna.

The advice is almost identical to that issued for the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine last month and comes as both are suspected of causing a new and very rare blood-clotting syndrome.

But health officials recommend individuals make a decision about what vaccine to take based on their risk level of becoming infected with COVID-19, maintaining that the benefits of all the vaccines are greater than the risks.

"That is very much dependent on where one lives and the type of activity one does where one lives," said Dr. Shelley Deeks, vice-chair of NACI.

"Immunity is working from home, not really going out, is a province or territory where there is not much disease, then they're in a very different situation than somebody that works in a manufacturing plant, has difficulty wearing PPE and is in a province that has a very high burden of disease."

Canada has received about 300,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Several provinces, meantime, expanded vaccine eligibility Monday.

Manitoba has expanded access to all Indigenous people 18 and over, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit - a move that comes as several provinces, including hard-hit Ontario, expand vaccine eligibility.

Vaccines had only been available in Manitoba to First Nations people over the age of 30. Health officials said more vaccines are arriving in the province and care members have been higher among Indigenous people.

In Ontario, residents 18 or older living in 114 hot spot neighborhoods were able to start

reserving appointments as of Monday.

This week instead, the province will send half of its vaccine supply to the hot spots, based on recommendations from the government's science advisers.

The province on Monday reported 3,436 new cases of COVID-19 and 16 additional deaths. The Health Department said 1,925 people are in hospital with the disease, but noted that more than 10 per cent of hospitals did not submit data over the weekend. The number of people in ICU with COVID-related illness stood at 819.

In Quebec, where officials on Monday reported 798 new cases of COVID-19 and two additional deaths, vaccination eligibility was expanded to include people aged 45 and up.

Nova Scotia, which reported 146 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, expanded its criteria to allow people between the ages of 50 and 54 to book appointments for mRNA vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech.

Chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam says testing for immunity to COVID-19 will now be able to distinguish between people who have antibodies because they were infected with COVID-19, and those who have antibodies due to a vaccine.

Canadian Blood Services has been testing the blood of donors, looking for COVID-19, for almost a year.

Tam says they will now shift to a test that will be able to tell whether antibodies are from infection or

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

What's happening elsewhere in Canada

Across the North, Iqbal declared a local state of emergency Monday, following confirmation of community transmission of COVID-19. Coun. Kyle Sheppard urged residents to follow the territory's public health measures. He called Iqbal's situation "historic." Nunavut reported eight new cases of COVID-19 Monday.

The Northwest Territories reported six new cases Monday, while Yukon had not yet reported.

Newfoundland and Labrador on Monday reported four new cases of COVID-19, as well as one additional case on a cargo ship.

Health officials in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island had not yet reported updated figures for the day.

Across the Prairies, Manitoba reported 251 new cases of COVID-19 Monday and one additional death. The legislature in one of Canada's COVID-19 hot spots is shutting down for two weeks. The Alberta government said the move is aimed at



COVID-19 Vaccine Janssen

slowing the rampant spread of the coronavirus after case counts in the province hit a new high, with 22,920 new cases.

A weekend rodeo, billed as an anti-lockdown event, attracted hundreds of people, even as case numbers in the province soar. The Alberta Health Service is investigating the event to determine what legal options it may have.

Dr. James Talbot, the province's former chief medical officer of health, says even though the rodeo was outdoors, it will likely prove to be a super-spreader event.

Saskatchewan reported 238 new cases and one additional death on Sunday.

British Columbia will report updated figures covering the weekend later Monday.

What's happening around the world

An early Monday afternoon, more than 15.9 million cases of COVID-19 had been reported worldwide, according to a case-tracking tool maintained by Johns Hopkins University. The

reported global death toll stood at more than 3.2 million.

In the Asia-Pacific region, India's daily vaccinations have fallen sharply from an all-time high reached early last month as domestic companies struggle to boost supplies and imports are limited, even as the country fights the world's worst coronavirus crisis.

India reported 368,147 new coronavirus cases and 1,417 deaths on Monday - numbers that experts believe are vast undercounts because of a widespread lack of testing and incomplete reporting.

The health ministry says it has confirmed 19.9 million COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, behind only the U.S., which has confirmed more than 32.4 million. It says more than 218,000 people have died.

On Monday, 24 COVID-19 patients died at a government-run hospital in the southern state of Karnataka amid reports of an oxygen shortage. It was unclear how many died due to a lack of oxygen, but the chief minister ordered an investigation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been severely criticized over its handling of the surge, which has pushed India's already fragile and underfunded health system to the brink. Massive election rallies organized by his Bharatiya Janata Party and other parties, as well as a giant Hindu festival on the banks of the Ganges, may have exacerbated the spread, experts said, noting that new variants could also be increasing cases.

Modi's party on Sunday suffered a resounding election defeat in a key state, West Bengal, failing to dislodge its far-right chief minister, Mamata Banerjee. It retained power in northeastern Assam state but lost two southern states.

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Canada's economy grew at a 6.5% pace to start 2021, slightly faster than U.S. did

Canada's economy expanded at a 6.5 per cent pace in the first three months of 2021, as the service sector is showing signs of coming out of the COVID-19 doldrums even as large parts of goods-producing industries are still lagging.

Statistics Canada reported Friday that Canada's gross domestic product expanded by 0.4 per cent in February alone. That came on the heels of a larger 0.7 per cent spike in January, which pushed preliminary data for March showing 0.9 per cent growth, that puts Canada on track for healthy growth for the quarter as a whole.

U.S. numbers out Thursday showed the American economy expanded by a bit less over the same time frame, at a 6.4 per cent expansionary pace.

"So, even with much more fanciful restrictions, a slower vaccine roll-out, and without the help of the two mega U.S. stimulus packages as the start of the year, somehow the Canadian economy matched the U.S. step for



stop through the winter months," Bank of Montreal economist Doug Porter said of the numbers. "That is impressive."

March's numbers are preliminary, so they may change in an update next month. But February's numbers are now final and they paint a picture of an economy having an uneven

recovery in December and January as lockdowns eased up.

The food and accommodation sector has been walloped by COVID-19 shutdowns, but it expanded by 3.5 per cent. That's the first monthly increase since August 2020.

On the flip side, manufacturing shrank for the second month in a row, this time by 0.9 per cent. And mining, quarrying and oil and gas contracted by 2.4 per cent, while transportation shrank by two per cent.

While it was encouraging to see overall growth picking up after a 2020 that ended up being the worst year on record for Canada's economy, economist Sri Thanabalaiahalingam with TD Bank said the numbers still show how long and slow the recovery from COVID-19 will be, as the virus is still very much affecting Canada's economy.

"February, and even March, seem like a long time ago don't they?" he said a note to clients after the numbers came out.

While vaccination efforts are ramping up and offer hope that things can get back to normal sometime this summer, "this timeline is uncertain. What's more certain is that the next phase of the recovery will require vaccines to gain the upper hand in the virus. Fingers crossed this happens sooner rather than later."

On Sunday, the country set a daily record, reporting 3,689 COVID-19 related deaths.

Trudeau says passengers arriving on non-direct flights from India will have to provide a negative test before departure, April 23, 2021.

To date, more than 215,500 people have died in India after contracting the virus.

So far, the country has administered 151.6 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, according to the latest tally from Johnson & Johnson's website.

That means more than 27.2 million, or 1.99 per cent of India's population are now fully vaccinated against the virus.

Britain, U.S. provided aid.

Canada's largest allies have also provided aid to India.

The British government announced on Sunday it would send another 1,000 ventilators to India.

The country had previously agreed to send 600 medical devices, including ventilators and oxygen concentrators to India.

"This support will help urgently meet some of India's acute needs, particularly oxygen for patients," Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said in a statement.

Why warnings of a deadly 3rd wave in Canada may have gone unheeded

It was a Friday in February and Canada's COVID-19 situation seemed to be improving. The second wave had crested. Just over 3,000 cases were reported countrywide that day, Feb. 19, down from a peak of 8,796 six weeks earlier.

Dr. Theresa Tam, however, came to a virtual news conference with a warning. New variants of the novel coronavirus threatened the country's progress.

"We've been saying all along that if we ease measures too soon, the epidemic will resurge even stronger. But with highly contagious variants in our midst, the threat of uncontrolled epidemic growth is significantly elevated," Canada's chief public health officer said.

"These variants have been spreading in the background and now they're on the rise," she said.

Tam released modeling that took variants into consideration for the first time. One graph showed cases growing exponentially. It said that the number of new cases could shoot up to 10,000 per day by late March if provinces kept the same restrictions in place, or increase even further and faster to 20,000 per day by mid-March if restrictions were relaxed even more.

But some businesses shattered during the second wave - including restaurants and bars in Alberta and retail stores in much of Ontario - had already reopened. And despite Tam's warnings, those two provinces and Quebec loosened restrictions throughout March.

All were faced to quickly backtrack by late March or early April. One of the possibilities forecasted in Tam's modeling had materialized: variants spread widely and cases skyrocketed.

Lockdown and public opinion.

This may have happened because politicians weigh the advice they get from scientists with public opinion, according to Mark Pickup, an associate professor of political science at Simon Fraser University who's studied the politicization of COVID-19 in Canada and the U.S.

"Public opinion is not always going to be lined up with the best scientific advice. And so the politicians are trying to balance those things off," Pickup told CBC News.

"And, of course, politicians are fallible. That's known by everyone."



Wherever there is ambiguity - like with mathematical models that forecast a range of different possibilities - there's room for policy-makers to insert their own opinions and ideology, he added.

But epidemiologists say the situation was avoidable.

"The writing was on the wall," said Kirsten Fiest, assistant professor and director of research and innovation at University of Calgary's Department of Critical Care Medicine.

"It was almost inevitable that what we're seeing now was going to happen. Warnings weren't heeded early on and they haven't been since, frankly."

In a media interview in February, Fiest cautioned that a third wave was possible in Alberta if businesses were opening up too soon and the spread of new virus variants was not controlled.

"I did, didn't I? And here we are," Ontario and Alberta are now the provinces hit hardest by third waves, with cases and hospitalizations soaring close or surpassing peaks seen in December and January.

Canadian Armed Forces teams and out-of-province health-care workers have flown into Ontario to relieve pressure on hospitals. And Alberta health-care workers are being briefed on triage protocols in case they be suddenly saving lives.

While daily death counts haven't come close to the highs seen in December and January, about 2,000 more Canadians have died since March 1.

Spokespeople for Alberta Premier Jason Kenney and Health Minister Tyler Shandro did not respond to questions sent by email.

A spokesperson for Ontario's Ministry of Health said the

and opened retail stores in the hardest-hit areas of Toronto and Peel on March 8. Premier Doug Ford's government also appealed restaurant capacity in red and orange zones, and allowed restaurants to serve on patios in Toronto and Peel.

Within weeks, doctors and experts were calling for more action.

Epidemiologists with Quebec's public health agency said new rules were needed to control the spread of variants at a media briefing on March 26.

Ontario was "being led down a very dangerous path," 153 intensive care unit (ICU) doctors wrote in a letter to Ford. His health minister and chief medical officer of health, on April 1.

An association of Edmonton-area health-care workers also wrote to their premier that day.

"The recent rapid increase in active COVID cases in Alberta represents the deadliest third wave which will dwarf what we saw in December if urgent and competent action is not taken," the letter said.

It was happening because of the more transmissible B.117 virus variant, because individuals weren't following rules, and because of the government's "premature relaxation of existing COVID-19 precautions which has encouraged super-spreader events," the doctors said.

Rumors circulate.

It wouldn't be long before looted medicine stores were targeted again.

Quebec put three regions into strict lockdowns April 1 and strengthened rules in Montreal and other red zones April 6. Gyms in Montreal were only open for 12 hours before being forced to shut their doors again.

Also on April 1, Premier Kenney acknowledged that the third wave had started in Alberta, saying that in the race between variants and vaccines, "variants are winning."

Five days later, he said that Alberta would move back to step one of its reopening plan. And on Thursday, Kenney announced even more measures, like the closing of junior and senior high schools in some communities, as cases hit a new high.

In Ontario, the story was the same. The whole province moved back into lockdown in April 1.

Even British Columbia, which had allowed indoor dining since May 2020 and had a tightened any restrictions since November, had to change course. The province announced a three-week lockdown on March 29, which the government now says will last until May 25.

Moham said he believes provincial leaders either don't understand the infection they've given or willfully disregard scientists' warnings.

Canada preparing to send COVID-19 medical equipment from emergency stockpile to India

As India faces down an emerging second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian government says it has identified medical equipment from its emergency stockpile that it is prepared to send overseas to help.

In an email to Global News on Sunday, a spokesperson for Health Canada said the Canadian government has "identified medical equipment that could be donated from its emergency stockpile, such as ventilators."

"The Government is working closely with Indian officials to identify specific needs on the ground, and how best Canada can assist," the email said.

However, Health Canada said the volunteers identified for donation will not compromise continued efforts to support the COVID-19 response in Canada.

It was not immediately clear which

supplies will be sent, or when.

However, Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced on Saturday that the province would be sending 3,000 ventilators to India.

"Ontario will always stand shoulder to shoulder with our friends," he wrote in a tweet.

In a statement emailed to Global News, a spokesperson for the Canadian Red Cross said at this time the organization is not "facilitating the direct deployment of medical supplies to India."

"However, the Red Cross has opened an appeal to provide Canadians with the opportunity to support the Indian Red Cross in their delivery of assistance to people affected or at risk of being affected by COVID-19."

The Canadian government has also pledged \$10 million in humanitarian assistance to the Canadian Red Cross to support the Indian Red Cross Society's response in India.

"Canada's contribution will support the procurement of essential supplies and medicines, including oxygen cylinders for clinics and ambulances," a spokesperson with Global Affairs Canada said in an email.

Announcing the aid last week, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said news from hospitals in India that are "unable to keep up with the number of patients" is "heartbreaking."

He said Foreign Affairs Minister Marc Garneau had spoken with members of the Indian government to determine Canada's help.

The devastating second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India has overwhelmed the country's hospitals, morgues and crematoriums.

The country added 392,488 new infections on Sunday alone, pushing its total case load to 19.56 million.

The second wave has been driven in large part - by a new, more transmissible variant of the coronavirus known as B.1.617.

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Sushmita Sen and Zoya Akhtar mourn the loss of loved ones due to Covid-19: 'Those aren't bonfires in the park'

Sushmita Sen spoke about the resilience of human spirit as India deals with the debilitating second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. The actor posted a picture of herself on Sunday and seemed a tribute for the frontline workers. She also thanked people who lost their lives to Covid-19. "My heart goes out to people who are fighting for a single breath... mourning the loss of loved ones... struggling to make a living... the plight of daily wage workers... all our vivid worries both medical & volunterers relentlessly fighting illnesses", she wrote.

She added it is a time that people should not waste a single moment and put their strength in saving life. "Let's not waste a single moment playing the blame game for the moment, can be better utilized doing everything. We can save a life? Every life is precious... we must not get used to it being reduced to a death toll number", she mentioned.

Later in the day, Zoya Akhtar also posted a moving couplet, paying her tribute to the lost souls. Commenting on the on-going rage against government's failure to handle Covid-19 surge, Zoya posted a slide which read, "She is gone I am told, death by strangulation took closer, you will see the marks. She is not the only one I am told serial killer took the lives, look closer, those aren't bonfires in the park."

Advance booking for Salman Khan's Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai have opened in Middle East

May has arrived and the countdown to the Salman Khan-starrer Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai has begun. In the current scenario, it looks unlikely that the audience will head back to theatres any time soon, but advance bookings have begun in the Middle East, where Salika is a big draw. The superstar's brother Sohail Khan shared the news and wrote, "Bhaiya, stay entertained."

Hasan, Fawad sparkle as Pakistan crush Zimbabwe in first Test

HARARE: Somers Hasan Ali took nine wickets in the match as Pakistan defeated hosts Zimbabwe by an innings and 116 runs after two on the third day of the first Test at the Harare Sports Club on Saturday. Hasan moved past 50 Test wickets as he took a career-best 5-36 to help bowl Zimbabwe out for 134. He recorded figures of 4-33 during the bow side's first-innings score of 116. Pakistan posted 424 in reply, anchored by Fawad Alsagar's superb 140 which put the tourists into a commanding position.



"We had planned to put 300-plus on the board (as a lead), and then bowled them out for 150-200," Pakistan captain Babar Azam said in the post-match presentation. "It was an outstanding finish by Hasan." Tariq Masood also scored in Zimbabwe's second innings with a career-best 43 before he was needlessly run out chasing a suicidal third run. It was a welcome opportunity for the batsman who had been dropped from his usual number three position to open due to an injury to Prince Maavara who did not net in the second innings.

IPL 2021: Stephen Fleming defends MS Dhoni's last-ball field setting

Chennai Super Kings (CSK) head coach Stephen Fleming defended captain MS Dhoni's move to have fielders near the boundary line when Mumbai Indians (MI) needed just two runs to win before the last ball of the game.

In a thrilling IPL encounter on Saturday, MI's Kieron Pollard (substituted 87 in 34 balls, 66, 86) just managed to push that outside-the-off-stump Yorker bowled by pacer Lungi Ngidi (0-42), when long on fielder Pat Dhruvase came and threw it, Pollard had enough time to secure those important two runs and seal the match by four wickets in Delhi.

Randhir Kapoor out of ICU, doing much better

Veteran actor Randhir Kapoor, who is undergoing treatment for Covid-19 at a hospital here, on Sunday said he has been moved out of the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).



After working as a child in the 1950s

Jayawickrama's six-for sets up Sri Lanka's imposing lead

KANDY: Praveen Jayawickrama's six-wicket haul shaped Sri Lanka's ascendancy over Bangladesh in the second Test in Pallekele on Saturday. The 22-year-old left-arm spinner took the best figures for Sri Lanka on Test debut, his 6 for 29, including the big wicket of Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim. The stunning debut performance, which is better than Yusuf Chaudhary's 6 for 179 against Pakistan in 1999, left the visitors trailing by 242 runs; Bangladesh losing their last seven wickets for 37 runs. Sri Lanka, however, didn't enforce the follow-on and ended the day on 17 for 2, losing Lakshin Thirimanne and Oshele Fernando. Mahidy Hasan, Samar and Tajal Islam respectively.

Shortly after the interval, Rameez Mesiah tapped Mostafizul Haque bow on 44 with a full toss that struck him flush on the toe. Liten Das was next to go as he guided a sharp-turning Jayawickrama delivery to Lakshin Thirimanne at slip. Bangladesh's lower-order craved in after that. Mehidy Hasan Miraz missed an arm-ball to give Jayawickrama his five-for, before he had Yasin Ahamd bow a few off-spin. The collapse ended in bizarre fashion when Tajal Islam was out hit wicket, when his shoe came off his back foot. Jayawickrama had taken away two wickets each.

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Health Canada issues failure warning for Canadian-made COVID-19 antibody treatment

TORONTO — Health Canada is warning about the "potential risk of treatment failure" for a Canadian-made COVID-19 monoclonal antibody, saying it may not protect against infection from certain variants.

Information issued on Wednesday, Health Canada said that bamlanivirum may fail to treat certain variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes COVID-19. The agency said the potential risk was identified through "global surveillance."

The agency said the antibody treatment is "expected to retain clinical benefit" against the B.1.1.7 variant, which was first identified in the United Kingdom.

However, Health Canada is advising health-care professionals that bamlanivirum "could inhibit indirect activity against SARS-CoV-2 variants" with the B.1.1.7, B.1.1.529, B.1.427 and B.1.429 variants reported in California, and the B.1.529 variant first identified in New York.

"Local epidemiology of variants should be taken into consideration before use of bamlanivirum as a single monoclonal antibody therapy. Bamlanivirum should be used only in regions where there is a known or confirmed low prevalence of lineages containing B.1.429, and/or B.1.529 SARS-CoV-2 variants," Health Canada said in its statement.

The agency said the treatment should also only be used if other monoclonal antibodies that retain neutralization activity against these variants are not available.

Bamlanivirum is a monoclonal antibody directed against the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2. The drug mimics the human immune system's ability to fight off the virus and was developed by AbCellon Biologics Inc. in Vancouver with the support of the federal government.

According to Health Canada, bamlanivirum may prevent symptoms

from becoming worse and reduce hospitalizations in high-risk patients who are infected with COVID-19.

The one-dose treatment, which is sold by Eli Lilly Canada, Inc., can be used in health-care facilities such as hospitals, as it is given by infusion into the vein of patients.

As the increasing variant spread, Health Canada now says patients using bamlanivirum should continue to be monitored for COVID-19 signs and symptoms of infection.

"The agency said patients treated with bamlanivirum should also be provided additional treatment when required."

In an emailed statement to CTV News, Eli Lilly Canada said that Health Canada's update on the risk of the treatment is "not related to any safety concerns" as it continues to work against COVID-19 and the B.1.1.7 variant.

"In Canada, more than 95 per cent of overall COVID-19 cases caused by variants are attributed to the U.K. variant (B.1.1.7 variant), which

are coming from the borders," Ford said in a news conference.

"Not enough is being done to keep these deadly variants out of Canada," he added. "If the borders weren't, the system would be working."

When a reporter asked Ford what he will do to win over voters dissatisfied by his handling of the pandemic, he replied, "Continue working hard, making sure that I do my job to make sure these variants don't come in through the border."

Data from Ontario's Ministry of Health shows that only one per cent of new COVID-19 infections reported in April were result of travel.

"Showing that he understands the stakes that he's made and showing a willingness to correct them will be really key for him in order to move forward," Lyle said. "Once he can get out of the pandemic and he moves on to economic recovery, he's positioned to do a lot better."

To know how difficult it can be to change public opinion once it turns against you, just ask Kathleen Wynne. The former premier's approval rating sank to a record low of 12 per cent in the spring of 2017 and she never really recovered, ultimately leading the Ontario Liberals to their worst-ever election in 2018.

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Hundreds of travellers to Canada test positive for COVID-19 variants

More than 2,000 people who returned to Canada since the federal government brought in mandatory hotel quarantine have tested positive for COVID-19, and more than a quarter of them were infected with a variant of concern.

Data supplied to The Canadian Press by the Public Health Agency of Canada show that between Feb. 22 and April 22, 557 international air travellers tested positive for a variant of concern.

Most of them — 518 cases — were infected with the B.1.1.7 variant first identified in the United Kingdom, which is the dominant variant in Canada. Another 277 tested positive for the P.1 variant first identified in Brazil.

The virus's mutations become "variants of concern" when they are confirmed to spread more easily, cause more severe illness or be resistant to known treatments or vaccines.

Data are not available to show if these passengers are believed to have infected anyone after arriving, but at some point, all of those variants arrived in Canada via travellers and their guests.



Information gathered from Ottawa has required a two-week quarantine for international arrivals since March 2020, but only those who have air passengers had to spend three days of that in a quarantine hotel.

As the variants arose, Canada also began requiring negative COVID-19 tests before boarding a plane, and from air and land border travellers upon arrival. Another test is now required at day eight. It was day 10 until April 23.

Health Canada has not been able to provide data to show how many passengers tested positive after leaving hotel quarantine. It also can't provide test results for any of the 297 Nova Scotia people who paid a \$3,000 fine for failing to stay in the quarantine hotel.

Susan Gulliver, an epidemiologist at NewLab Clinical Research in St. John's, N.L., said part of the issue is that for all land travellers, and for most of the quarantine period for air passengers, they're on their own.

Leaving from other countries: Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and South Korea, all with much lower COVID-19 rates than Canada, require travellers to quarantine for two full weeks after arriving.

Gulliver said three days with

supervised quarantine is not enough.

"It should be supervised for the entire stay, for both their protection and the protection of the public," she said, noting if someone gets sick in quarantine they can be monitored to ensure they get medical help if they need it.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau defends the government's policies as among the strongest in the world and says most of the travellers are Canadians who cannot be refused entry.

"It has to be complemented with a whole suite of measures. That alone is not going to actually amount to anything, really."

He said rapid testing and good contact tracing is a must, as is swift action to contain outbreaks when they are identified.

Ontario may shorten interval between vax doses as more supply expected: Elliott

Ontario might shorten the length of time between COVID-19 vaccine doses as it prepares to receive more supply this month.

The province expects to receive weekly Pfizer vaccine shipments of more than 785,000 doses in May, and more than 958,000 doses in June.

Health Minister Christine Elliott said Monday that the additional supply might allow the province to shorten the four-month interval between the first and second shots.

"We expect that with the much larger quantities of the Pfizer vaccines that we're receiving throughout the month of May, that we may well be able to shorten the timeline for people to receive their second doses," she said.

If that happens, Elliott said people will be contacted to arrange a new time for their second appointment, adding that their new interval would be closer to the original timeline for vaccinations.

Pfizer recommends a 21-day interval between its two shots, while Moderna recommends four weeks and Oxford-AstraZeneca advises between four and twelve weeks.

Ontario extended the interval between doses this year in a period of slow vaccine supply to Canada, making room for exceptions for certain at-risk individuals.

The province is sending half its COVID-19 hot spots for the next two weeks.

Ontario's political parties gear up for next spring's election in the shadow of COVID-19

Mark your calendars: Ontario's next provincial election campaign officially begins on June 17, Tuesday.

Ontario's fixed-date election law sets voting day as June 2, 2022, and the formal start of the campaign period as noon May 4.

Although a year may seem like a long time — and although a federal election may be called before Ontario votes — all of the provincial parties are voting steadily on preparing for the campaign. They're nominating candidates, sketching out strategies, building their election platforms and raising money, all under the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How strongly the pandemic will play into Ontario voters' decisions a year from now is one of the great unknowns right now.

Successive polls in the past month show growing disaffection with how Premier Doug Ford and his Progressive Conservative government

are handling the province's response to COVID-19.

Yet there's no guarantee that this disaffection will last until June 2, 2022, much less bring about a PC election loss. Still, recent sharp shifts in Ford's approval, including his U-turn on paid sick days, suggest his strategists are worried that public opinion could harden against them.

Near-record levels of awareness, concern

"They should be quite concerned because what's been impacted are underlying feelings about the premier and the government," said Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research Group, a national firm specializing in opinion research.

"Public opinion is anchored by underlying feelings," Lyle said in an interview.

His firm has long tracked how closely Ontarians are following provincial politics, and his research shows near-record levels of awareness

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