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**More than 200 bodies found at Indigenous school in Canada**

The remains of 215 children, some as young as 3 years old, have been found buried on the site of what was once Canada's largest Indigenous residential school - one of the institutions that held children taken from their families across the nation.

Chief Rosanne Casimir of the Tk'emlupse to Secwepemc First Nation said in a news release that the remains were confirmed but revealed with the help of ground-penetrating radar.

More bodies may be found because there are more areas to search on the school grounds, Casimir said Friday.

In an earlier release, she called the discovery a "unfathomable loss that was spoken about but never documented at the Kamloops Indian Residential School."

From the 19th century until the 1970s, more than 150,000 First Nations children were required to attend state-funded Christian schools as part of a program to assimilate them into Canadian society. They were forced to convert to Christianity and not allowed to speak their native languages. Many were beaten and verbally abused, and up to 6,000 are said to have died.

The Canadian government apologized in Parliament in 2008 and admitted that physical and sexual abuse in the schools was rampant. Many students recall being beaten for speaking their native languages; they also lost touch with their parents and customs.

Indigenous leaders have cited that legacy of abuse and isolation as the root cause of epidemic rates of alcoholism and drug addiction on reservations.

A report more than five years ago by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission said at least 3,200 children had died amid abuse and neglect, and it said it had reports of at least 51 deaths at the Kamloops school alone between 1915 and 1961.

"This really reinforces the issue of residential schools and the wounds from the legacy of genocide towards Indigenous people," Terry Toppes, Assembly of First Nations regional chief for British Columbia, said Friday.

British Columbia Premier John Horgan said he was "horrified and heartbroken" to learn of the discovery, calling it a "tragedy of 'unimaginable proportions'" that highlights the violence and consequences of the residential school system.

The Kamloops school operated between 1880 and 1969, when the federal government took over operations from the Catholic Church and operated it as a day school until closed in 1978.

Casimir said it's believed the deaths are unaccounted for, although a local museum archivist is working with the Royal British Columbia Museum to see if any records of the deaths can be found.

"Given the size of the school, with

up to 500 students registered and attending at any one time, we understand that this confirmed loss affects First Nations communities across British Columbia and beyond," Casimir said in the initial release issued on Thursday.

The leadership of the Tk'emlupse community "acknowledges their responsibility to caretake for these lost children," Casimir said.

Access to the latest technology allows for a true accounting of the missing children and will hopefully bring some peace and closure to those lives lost, she said in the release.

Casimir said band officials are informing community members and surrounding communities that had children who attended the school.

The First Nations Health Authority called the discovery of the remains "extremely painful" and said in a website posting that it "will have a significant impact on the Tk'emlupse community and in the communities served by this residential school."

The authority's CEO, Richard Jovic, said the discovery "illustrates the damaging and lasting impacts that the residential school system continues to have on First Nations people, their families and communities."

Nicole Schabas, a law professor at Thompson Rivers University, said each of her first-year law students at the Kamloops university spends at least one day at the former residential school speaking with survivors about conditions they had endured.

She said the discovery for survivors talk about an unmarked grave area, "but they all talk about the kids who didn't make it."

**Coronavirus: What's happening in Canada and around the world on May 30**

Manitoba identified 292 new cases and 18 new deaths. The province also admitted 17 patients to intensive care units in the past 24 hours - marking an "unfortunate milestone" and record high in the province's pandemic response, a Shared Health spokesperson said.

Ontario registered 1,053 new cases and 18 new deaths.

Meanwhile, the provincial government says it will replace Dr. David Williams as chief medical officer of health, as Williams plans to retire in June. Williams, who was set to retire months ago but delayed the move because of the COVID-19 pandemic, has held the position for five years.

He will be replaced by Dr. Kirsten Moore, currently the medical officer of health for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Public Health. Moore is expected to step into the role on June 26.

Quebec confirmed 315 new cases and two new deaths on Sunday.

New Brunswick logged nine new cases. Health officials also announced that more than 62 per cent of residents over the age of 12 in the province have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Nova Scotia reported one death and 20 new cases on Sunday - the lowest number of new infections in more than a month.

With new daily cases on a

downward trend and, as of Friday, 53 per cent of Nova Scotians having received at least one vaccine dose, the province will begin the first phase of a four-phase reopening plan on Wednesday.

Newfoundland and Labrador is moving communities in the Stephenville area and on the Port au Port Peninsula to Alert Level 4 in response to a cluster of cases in the western part of the province.

The increased public health measures will come into effect at 4 p.m. Sunday, as 11 cases have now been tied to the cluster. There are also three potential positive cases.

What's happening around the world

As of Sunday, more than 170 million cases of COVID-19 had been reported worldwide, according to a database from Johns Hopkins University in the United States. The reported global death toll stood at more than 3.5 million.

In the Americas, two-thirds of adults in the U.S. state of New York have now received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, as hospitalizations statewide continue to decline.

In Europe, the U.K. vaccine minister says the government may require National Health Service workers to be inoculated against COVID-19 in hopes of preventing medical workers from spreading the coronavirus to their patients.

In Asia, Myanmar's COVID-19 testing has dropped dramatically and hospital workers are spread thin in the wake of February's military coup, as doctors and nurses who joined protests and protests against the junta are being arrested in large numbers.

In Africa, South Africa has extended its nightly curfew and limited the number of people at gatherings to slow the spread of COVID-19 as positive cases surge, President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Sunday.

**Canada's economy could grow by 6.1% this year as COVID-19 restrictions ease: OECD**

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has upgraded its outlook for Canadian economic growth for this year.

The Paris-based think tank says it now expects the Canadian economy to grow by 6.1 per cent this year. The prediction is up from an estimate for growth of 4.7 per cent that the OECD made in March.

It says the rebound will be thanks to relaxed COVID-19 restrictions in the second half of the year and external demand.

The OECD says growth in Canada for 2022 is forecasted at 3.8 per cent compared with a March estimate of four per cent.

Could COVID-19 vaccine passports kick start Canadian economy? - May 22, 2021

The improved outlook for Canada came as the OECD forecast global output would rise 5.8 per cent this year, up from its forecast of 4.8 per cent in December.

Statistics Canada is expected to release Canadian gross domestic product figures for the first quarter on Tuesday.

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## Only 20 per cent of workers in Canada want to return to office full time post-COVID: poll

Canadians are in no rush to head back to the office even as COVID-19 cases and deaths continue to decline across the country, a new survey suggests.

A recent poll by Leger and the Association for Canadian Studies has found that 15 per cent of Canadian respondents who have worked from home during the pandemic have found the experience to be very or somewhat positive, while just 20 per cent want to return to the office every day.

Only 17 per cent described working from home as somewhat or very negative.

Almost 60 per cent of those surveyed said they would prefer to return to the office part-time or occasionally, while 19 per cent said they were not wanting to go back.

The top three reasons for preferring to continue to work from home were convenience, saving money and increased productivity.

Some 35 per cent of those surveyed in Canada agreed with the statement

"If my supervisor ordered me to go back to the office, I would start to look for another job when I can work from home."

The Leger survey queried 1,647 Canadians and 1,002 Americans between May 21 to 25, and cannot be assigned a margin of error because it was done online.

The data comes as several provinces have started easing pandemic restrictions as new cases and hospitalizations continue to come down from third-wave highs.

Saskatchewan announced the first phase of its reopening plan on Sunday, as it reported the lowest people in hospital with COVID-19 since Nov. 28.

The changes that took effect in the province include easing restrictions on outdoor sports and allowing private gatherings to have up to 10 people, public indoor gatherings to have up to 30 people and public outdoor gatherings, up to 150 people.

Quebec, which reported 315 cases on Sunday, will ease restrictions in

eight different regions on Monday.

The regions, which include Quebec City but not Montreal, will move from red to orange on the province's pandemic alert system, allowing gyms and restaurant dining rooms to reopen.

Newfoundland and Labrador, however, went in the other direction as it tightened restrictions in the western region in response to a growing COVID-19 hot spot.

Dr. Rossan Seivour, provincial medical officer of health, announced restrictions were being increased in the region because of a number of cases with no identified source of infection.

As a result, Seivour said communities in the Stephenville area and on the Port au Port Peninsula were being moved to Alert Level 4 as of 4 p.m. Sunday, meaning people are advised to stay home as much as possible except to get essential like grocery and medication.

In a statement, Canada's chief

public health officer said that easing restrictions needs to be done gradually, especially given the risk presented by more contagious variants.

"As restrictions start to be lifted based on conditions in your area, it is still important that everyone continues to follow local public health advice and keep up with individual protective practices like physical distancing and wearing a mask regardless of whether you have been vaccinated or not," Dr. Theresa Tam wrote.

Ontario announced Sunday that it would move on Monday to replace Dr. David Williams, its chief medical officer of health.

While the province praised his leadership during the COVID-19 crisis, critics have taken aim at his rambling communication style and his failure to push stiffer restrictions ahead of a surge in COVID-19 cases earlier this year.

Health Minister Christine Elliott issued a statement saying the government would move on Monday to replace Williams with Dr. Kimm Moore, who has done more in his role as medical officer of health for Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington Public Health.

In a statement, Canada's chief

## Why did Canada's two biggest COVID-19 workplace outbreaks get so big, so fast?

Eight thousand four hundred oilfield workers have now received a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Doses were delivered on site during a series of clinics organized by the Oil Sands Community Alliance and Alberta Health Services.

"The on-site oil sands vaccination clinics in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo completed earlier this week," an OCSA spokesperson said in an e-mail to Global News.

"We will continue to partner with AHS to determine if there is potential to add additional on-site clinics to administer first and second doses to our workforce."

The vaccinations appear to be having an impact on more than 20 outbreaks at oilfield work sites or work camps in the region, with the number of active cases has fallen to 315 from a high of more than 1,100 just a few weeks ago.

The variant-fueled third wave hit Alberta's oilfield workers hard. The two largest outbreaks led to nearly 3,000 infections.

An outbreak at Sycrude's Mildred Lake site, an outbreak was first declared in September 2020 but cases began to surge in March and April 2021. By May 25, the site had a total of 1,329 cases.

An outbreak at Canadian Natural Resources' Horizon site was first declared in October 2020 but it also saw a surge in cases starting in the spring. By May 25, the site had reported 1,542 cases and three deaths.

One of the people who died was a contractor who worked for the construction company Black & McDonald. On May 19, CEO Bruce McDonald wrote about the worker's death in a post on the company's website.

"A gentleman who worked for us in our Western Industrial group died Saturday in a northern Alberta hospital from COVID-19 complications. He had spent nearly one month in the intensive care unit after becoming ill during a shutdown project that B&M was performing at



Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. (CNRL)'s Horizon mine and bitumen extraction site in Fort Mackay.

the ultimate authority over essential worker exemptions. Under the exemption put in place by the federal government in April 2020, essential workers are not required to quarantine," said Alberta Health spokesperson Tom McMillan.

"Once the federal exemption was given, which is a necessary prerequisite, a matching provincial sector exemption was granted."

Sycrude spokesperson Will Gibson says about 60 out-of-country workers were brought to the Mildred Lake site for the spring turnaround. Most of those workers were required by Sycrude to complete a 14-day quarantine but he says in a "hand full of cases," exemptions were made.

"One example was for a fully-vaccinated contractor brought up from the United States," Gibson said.

Canadian Natural Resources brought out-of-country workers in to help with its spring maintenance project at CNRL Horizon as well but company spokesperson Julie Woo says none of those workers were required to quarantine on arrival.

"Canadian Natural required approximately 60 highly specialized technical individuals from the U.S. over the 30-day Horizon turnaround. All federal and provincial requirements for sectors designated as essential services were followed, including the requirement for travelers to present proof of a negative COVID-19 test result issued within 72 hours prior to boarding a flight to Canada. Additionally, Canadian Natural used rapid test kits provided by AHS at Horizon as another tool for COVID-19 screening onsite."

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Mayor Don Scott says he was surprised and concerned to learn out-of-country workers were coming to his community with no required quarantine.

"Any first people are exempt from rules, that's going to cause a problem and I'm surprised that the government would permit that. It just does not make sense for the people of our region. It doesn't protect everybody," he said.

"We always been a big believer that governments have a responsibility to protect people's health, that's a primary responsibility, so if they're providing exemptions and then there's outbreaks, there is a pretty obvious link between the two."

## How Ontario's reopening plan compares to other provinces

TORONTO — As Ontario waits to enter step one of its reopening plan, officials in British Columbia and Alberta have unveiled their own pandemic exit strategies that will see restrictions relaxed much quicker.

Officials in B.C. unveiled the province's five-step reopening plan on Tuesday, less than a week after Ontario released their three-step plan.

Alberta released their three-step reopening plan Wednesday.

While all three plans are gradual, Ontario will move at a slower pace with much stricter restrictions along the way.

Ontario is expected to enter the first step of the reopening plan on Tuesday, June 14. Alberta will wait until June 1, while B.C. is jumping right in.

British Columbia

Things like outdoor dining, gyms, barber shops, and shopping centres were already allowed to be open before the reopening plan was announced.

In Ontario, non-essential retail will be allowed to reopen in step one, but there will be strict capacity limits in place. Personal care services won't be allowed in Ontario until step two, which will come in July at the earliest.

Indoor gatherings of up to five people, or one household, can also resume immediately in B.C. — something that also won't happen in Ontario until step two.

In the first phase of B.C.'s reopening plan, non-essential travel outside of a resident's region is illegal.

Around June 15, if 65 per cent of the population has received a first dose of the vaccine, outdoor personal gatherings jump to 30 people, while indoor organized gatherings can also have 50 people.

At that time, recreational travel throughout the province will be allowed.

When B.C. hits step three — which could be as early as Canada Day — masks will no longer be mandatory in indoor spaces.

At least 70 per cent of people must have had their first dose before entering step three.

Ontario has not released any information on when masks will no longer be required.

In step three, there will be no rules on personal indoor or outdoor gatherings in the province.

By comparison, when 70 per cent of Ontarians have their first dose of the vaccine, indoor gatherings will be capped at 10 people.

Step three in B.C. will also mean recreational travel with friends gets the thumbs up and nightclubs can reopen with capacity limits.

Ontario will likely wait to be in step one at the point, which will mainly focus on outdoor activities and won't offer nearly the same amount of freedom.

Around Sept. 7, B.C. will reach step four, which is virtually a complete return to normal.

Unlike Ontario, the reopening plan

in B.C. does not take into account how many people have received a second dose.

Alberta

Alberta's reopening plan will lift restrictions in three phases based on vaccination and public health metrics.

The province announced the new three-step reopening plan on Wednesday afternoon.

Alberta will enter stage one on June 1, which is two weeks after 50 per cent of people 12 and up have received a vaccine.

This stage still bans things like indoor dining, but outdoor dining can reopen.

Social gathering limits increase to 10 people, while personal wellness services, like hair salons, can reopen by appointment only.

Stage two comes two weeks after 60 per cent of those eligible have had a vaccine, which is expected to be around mid-June.

Outdoor social gathering limits increase to 20 people, indoor dining resumes and public outdoor gatherings (like concerts and festivals) jump to 150 people.

Stage three kicks in when 70 per cent of Albertans have received a first dose of the vaccine.

According to the province, at this stage all restrictions, including social gathering limits, will be dropped.



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# Ont. 'close' to exiting third wave as province records lowest daily case count since February: Williams

The province's top public health doctor says Ontario is getting close to exiting the third wave of the pandemic as officials record fewer than 1,000 new COVID-19 cases for the first time in nearly three months today.

Ontario logged 916 new infections on Monday, marking the lowest single-day total since Feb. 17 and the first time since March 6 that the province saw its daily case count dip below 1,000.

Ontario reported 1,033 new cases on Sunday, 1,057 on Saturday, and 1,466 new infections Monday.

The three-day average of new cases was 1,178, down from 1,735 last week.

Dr. David Williams, Ontario's outgoing chief medical officer of health, has previously said he would like to see daily case counts drop to between 550 and 600 before beginning to ease public health restrictions. The Ford government has set a tentative date of June 14 for the resumption of outdoor dining and the reopening non-essential



retail stores at 15 per cent capacity.

"We are still in the third wave, but our numbers are coming down but we are not yet below where we need (to) be to transition between the second and third wave. We are getting close and we want to make sure that we continue on this path," Williams said at a news conference on Monday afternoon.

"The numbers we talked to today are most encouraging as we had projected with our vaccination rates continuing to rise."

With 18,226 cases processed over the past 24 hours, the Ministry of Health is reporting a provincewide positivity rate of 4.3 per cent, down from 6.4 per cent last week.

The number of known, active COVID-19 cases in Ontario is now 12,567, down from 20,038 last Monday.

Provincial health officials say there are currently 731 COVID-19 patients receiving treatment in Ontario hospitals with 617 in intensive care units (ICU), including about 30 patients who were transferred to the province from

Manitoba.

Last week, there were 916 people in hospital with COVID-19 and 687 patients in the ICU.

It should be noted that hospital admission data is typically incomplete early in the week as some hospitals do not report information to the ministry overnight.

Thirteen more deaths were reported on Monday, bringing the total number of virus-related deaths in Ontario to 8,757.

Of those cases reported today, 226 are in Toronto, 165 are in Peel Region, 85 are in York Region, 67 are in Durham Region, and 52 are in Hamilton.

The province says 9,082,825 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have now been administered in Ontario today.

Starting today, everyone in Ontario who is aged 90 and older is now eligible to book their second shot through the province's booking system.

"We really have to get second doses in quickly. There are variants of concern, for example the variant that was initially discovered in India. It is spreading globally, it is here in Canada, it is here in Ontario, it is here in the GTA," Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious diseases specialist and member of the province's COVID-19 science task force, told CP24 on Monday morning.

But some experts say it's time to shift to prioritizing second doses for Canadians because of an increase in vaccine supply, a drop in COVID-19 levels and the growing threat of more contagious coronavirus variants that could undermine the progress made.

"There is no question that for the whole of Canada, from the perspective of lives saved, that giving single doses to people and asking them to defer their second dose was the best idea," said Dr. Allison McCreer, a medical microbiologist and infectious diseases specialist at Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital.

"Of course I want my two doses of vaccine. But if the price of that is somebody else maybe dying because of it - that's just not OK. I think we can do that."

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) made the updated recommendation to delay second doses by up to four months for all Canadians in March, based on limited real-world evidence and the reality of Canada's vaccine supply.

It said if second doses were stretched by up to four months across the country, close to 80 per cent of Canadians over 16 could get at least one dose by the end of June.

That decision was not without its critics, who pointed to the fact that the vaccine manufacturers recommended sticking to the approved clinical interval of three weeks for Pfizer-BioNTech and four weeks for Moderna and AstraZeneca-Oxford.

At the time, Canada's chief science advisor, Mona Nemer, said the decision to delay doses amounted to a "population level experiment."

The decision was also informed by findings from Dr. Danuta Skowronski, the epidemiology lead at the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCDC), who determined that one dose of the vaccine was actually more effective than clinical trials had initially shown.

# Why experts say 2nd vaccine doses should be rolled out now

Canada's controversial decision to delay second doses of COVID-19 vaccines far beyond other countries and manufacturing guidelines was a calculated risk, some experts say that without question it worked.

More Canadians were given partial protection from one dose, as opposed to what would've been half as many fully protected with two. That helped to drive our surging third wave down in much of the country at a critical time.

But some experts say it's time to shift to prioritizing second doses for Canadians because of an increase in vaccine supply, a drop in COVID-19 levels and the growing threat of more contagious coronavirus variants that could undermine the progress made.

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The decision was also informed by findings from Dr. Danuta Skowronski, the epidemiology lead at the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCDC), who determined that one dose of the vaccine was actually more effective than clinical trials had initially shown.



"It was a calculated benefit risk," she told CBC News. "It was public health doing its job. This is what we expect of public health authorities: to take the emerging evidence during an emerging crisis and consider what is best for the population they serve."

Skowronski said there was never meant to be a delay in second doses of COVID-19 vaccines would allow for more time to generate heightened antibody responses and improve the boost response of the second shot - much like for other vaccines.

And emerging research appears to be proving her right.

Research suggests delaying 2nd doses was "lightweight".

A new Canadian preprint study, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, found the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines' effectiveness grew from 48 per cent after 14 days after the first dose to 71 per cent after 35 to 41 days.

The observational study looked at close to 325,000 people in Ontario from mid-December to mid-April and concluded that while vaccine effectiveness was lower for those aged 70 and over initially - it grew to comparable levels found in younger adults after 28 days.

"I think that's an important finding - that we just need to be patient after the first dose, that the first dose effectiveness is actually pretty good," said Dr. Jeff Kwong, an epidemiologist and senior scientist at the Toronto-based research organization KCES.

"That provides good reassurance that the strategy of getting as many people a first dose as possible was the right move."

A recent study in The Lancet medical journal looked at more than 23,000 vaccinated healthcare workers in the United Kingdom from December to February and found the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was at least

specifically, experts say the variant first identified in India known as B.1617 could potentially pose a significant threat to Canada's future vaccine effectiveness.

Prof. Ashleigh Tuite, an infectious diseases epidemiologist and assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health, said B.1617 may be spreading behind the scenes in Canada - much like the variant first identified in the U.K. first did.

"We know that it was here, we know that we were importing cases and we were in a situation where we had declining cases overall, but we were starting to see signs that B.117 was starting to take hold," she said. "What we're starting to see the signs of right now is something similar [with B.1617]."

But unlike for B.117, Tuite said Canada isn't able to screen for B.1617 as easily through genetic sequencing, now that there's a "full picture" of the number of cases here aside from a category of variant-positive cases classified as "unknown".

Maria Sudastran, an infectious diseases epidemiologist and post-doctoral fellow at the University of Toronto's Centre for Vaccine Preventable Diseases who co-authored the study on vaccine effectiveness in Ontario, said Canada is fortunate B.1617 hasn't played a "major role" in our epidemic yet, but it's something we need to "keep our eye on in the future."

B.1617 is currently the dominant strain driving a third wave in the U.K., leading to a surge in not only COVID-19 cases but hospitalizations as well, causing the nation to accelerate its vaccination program in order to avoid jeopardizing the reopening of the British economy.

A recent cluster of COVID-19 in Newfoundland & Labrador that has grown to at least 600 cases was confirmed as being caused by B.1617, but outbreaks of the variant have also been detected in B.C., Quebec, Alberta and Ontario.

Dr. Michael Warner, medical director of critical care at Michael G. DeGroote Hospital in Toronto, said if Canada doesn't follow suit we could see more breakthrough infections in the partially vaccinated and risk a similar resurgence of COVID-19.

"We need to get the people at the highest risk of being exposed to COVID-19 and the highest risk of being severely ill from COVID-19 their maximum protection," he said. "And I think we have enough supply that we can do that without cannibalizing first shot opportunities for everyone else."

# Doug Ford promises announcement on whether schools will reopen 'in a day or two'

TORONTO -- Premier Doug Ford says that his government will make an announcement on whether schools will reopen for a few weeks in June "in the next day or two."

Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. David Williams and Ontario's science advisory table have both endorsed a resumption of in-person classes on a region-by-region basis but Ford has been slow to make a decision, telling reporters last week that he wants "consensus" before allowing students to return to the classroom.

To that end, Ford wrote an open letter to dozens of medical experts and stakeholders on Thursday seeking their input on a potential reopening of schools by the following day.

Speaking with a pool camera at

Queen's Park on Monday, Ford said that his government is still reviewing that feedback but is getting closer to making a decision.

Williams had previously highlighted today's date as an "opportunity" time to reopen schools given the limited number of teaching days left in the academic year.

"We'll have an announcement in the next day or two and we'll get out there and make that announcement about going back to school or not," Ford promised when asked whether he had any update for parents.

Schools have been closed for in-person learning since mid-April but with the province planning to enter the first phase of its reopening plan by June 14, there have been increasing calls

to allow students to return to the classroom.

Ford, however, has expressed concerns about the increased risk of COVID-19 transmission associated with reopening schools. The science table has warned that a full reopening of schools would result in a six to 11 per cent rise in daily case counts but it has called that "manageable" given the benefits of allowing students to return to the classroom.

During Question Period at Queen's Park on Monday, Education Minister Stephen Lecce seemed to express confidence that schools can operate safely but he refused to comment on whether they will be reopened prior to the end of the academic year, noting that his government "needs to take

the time to get this right."

Health Minister Christine Elliott also provided a cryptic response when speaking with reporters following Question Period.

"This is a very big decision because what we are considering is the health and safety of children and young people in Ontario, their teachers and other school officials," she said. "We need to take the time to get this right. The premier has been very clear about that since the beginning and that is why he is receiving the information that has been submitted to him and Dr. Williams, Minister Lecce and others are reviewing the information carefully so the right decision is made about when a return to school should be happening."

So far local medical officers of health in Peel, Toronto and York have all publicly indicated that they would support reopening schools in their communities. Williams has said that only the Perceptics Health Unit in northern Ontario has ruled out a return to the classroom.

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