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No, vaccine boosters won't stop an Omicron surge. They can buy us time, experts say

Despite efforts to increase uptake in many parts of Canada, vaccine boosters won't stop a fifth wave, says the scientific director of Ontario's Science Advisory Table.

But boosters will buy time for provinces not yet facing an Omicron variant fuelled surge, according to Dr. Peter Jitai.

Speaking to Cross Country Checkup, Jitai said that provinces must instead use the third doses as part of broader efforts - including tighter restrictions on some businesses and personal gatherings - that will help prepare Canadians for the coming month.

"It's not a recipe against the current tidal wave that Ontario is starting to face already, and other provinces will follow," said Jitai.

"We invest with the booster so that when we loosen restrictions again... we start to see protections through the boosters. That's the idea."

Several provinces have already announced measures intended to curb the spread of COVID-19 cases caused by the Omicron variant. B.C., Ontario and Quebec have all closed down on capacity limits in businesses. Some jurisdictions announced plans to make rapid tests more accessible, though demand has outstripped supply.

But several provinces - including B.C., Alberta and Quebec - have yet to announce plans to expand booster doses to all adults, even as experts call for faster rollout. They say it can take two weeks or more for the boosters to help people develop the needed immunity increase.

"Nothing matters more than getting these third shots into arms," said Ontario Premier Doug Ford at a news conference on Wednesday. Booster shots will be available to everyone over 18 in that province as of Monday, while a handful of other provinces have already lowered eligibility.

Uncertainty around booster shots is causing anxiety for many Canadians as the more-transmissible Omicron variant spreads holiday plans. Multiple provinces set single-day records for case counts this week.

Though early data shows promising results for the efficacy of boosters in fighting the Omicron variant, Lawrence Young, a virologist and professor at Britain's Warwick Medical School, says it's too early to know exactly how it will change the course of the next wave.

"It's quite clear, however, that there is something really important about getting booster shots to protect [against] the severe disease and, indeed, protect your health service as well," he said.

The United Kingdom is facing a steep uptick in cases as a result of the Omicron variant, and Young notes that hospitalizations in London are slowly rising.

Provinces differ on booster rollout. Dr. Jennifer Russell, chief medical officer of health for New Brunswick,

The federal government is advising Canadians to avoid non-essential travel outside Canada as the Omicron variant spreads rapidly worldwide. Incoming travellers are subject to testing and self-isolation requirements based on their vaccination status.

But when it comes to travel within Canada, the rules vary. Individual provinces and territories may have their own set of restrictions and quarantine rules that people must follow in addition to federal guidelines.

For people travelling by plane or train between jurisdictions, a federal policy currently requires everyone 12 and up to show proof of vaccination to board domestic or international flights-departing from most airports in Canada, as well as VIA Rail and Rocky Mountaineer trains.

Here's a look at some of the other rules travellers may face depending on the province or territory they are entering.

(There may be additional or separate rules for travellers coming from outside of Canada or children under the age of 12; check each jurisdiction's website for details.)

Newfoundland and Labrador
Nearly everyone 12 and up entering Newfoundland and Labrador must submit this travel form within 30 days of their expected travel date, with limited exceptions.

Prince Edward Island
If a traveller is fully vaccinated:
"Starting Dec. 21, incoming travellers must self-isolate for five days upon arrival and take a rapid COVID-19 test every day for five days, after which point they can leave isolation if all results are negative."

Quebec
"Rotational workers can follow modified self-isolation for those five days but must also book a PCR test outside the province in the last 14 days must also take a PCR test within their first days of arrival."

Where provinces and territories stand on travel restrictions as Omicron concerns rise

If a traveller is not fully vaccinated:
"Travellers must self-isolate until they receive the negative results from a PCR test taken on Day 7 or later, or self-isolate for 14 days if they choose not to be tested."

"They must avoid vulnerable people and are barred from visiting long-term care facilities, sporting events and large crowded settings in the first 14 days after they arrive."

On Dec. 17, the province banned any travel around the province for sporting events, recreation and arts events, though teams can continue to play within their own region.

Prince Edward Island
All travellers aged eight and up will be tested at the points of entry, regardless of immunization status and how long they were outside of the province.

Fully vaccinated:
"Travellers can apply for the PEI Pass, which can be used multiple times and allows entry into the province without the need to self-isolate."

Not fully vaccinated:
"With some exceptions, travellers to P.E.I. who are not fully vaccinated must self-isolate for eight days and obtain another negative test result on Day 8 to leave self-isolation."

"They must complete a self-isolation declaration."

P.E.I. announced new travel-related measures on Dec. 2, including a ban on children under 12 travelling to participate in interprovincial sporting tournaments or art and cultural events.

Nova Scotia
Nearly everyone ages 12 and up must complete this safe check-in form before entering Nova Scotia from another province or territory. This includes people who are fully vaccinated.

Those who don't need to complete the form (full list of exemptions here) include travellers who are following the COVID-19 Protocol for Atlantic Canada Travel. This guidance applies to people who travel between Nova Scotia and another Atlantic province regularly or for certain reasons.

Fully vaccinated:
"Travellers are not required to self-isolate, though testing is recommended."

Not fully vaccinated:
"Travellers may need to self-isolate for seven days, at which point they can leave self-isolation 1) if they receive two negative test results or 2) without getting tested if they have official documentation showing they recently recovered from COVID-19."

"Certain travellers who are not fully vaccinated, such as some essential workers, are exempt from the self-isolation requirement but may need to follow a separate protocol."

On Dec. 1, Nova Scotia announced new rules for children 11 and under that prohibit travelling into or out of the province to participate in arts or sports games, competitions and tournaments.

New Brunswick
All travellers ages 12 and up must pre-register online here and provide proof of vaccination (or proof of medical exemption), with some exceptions.

Fully vaccinated:
"Travellers are not required to self-isolate and can apply for a multi-use pass."

Not fully vaccinated:
"Travellers must self-isolate for 14 days or until they obtain a negative test result on Day 10 or later. They will be required to register for each trip into the province."

"Travellers who have proof of a medical exemption don't need to self-isolate and can apply for a multi-use pass."

Quebec
Travellers arriving from another province or territory don't need to self-isolate, but the province says non-essential travel should be avoided.

Travel to the territories of Nunavut and the Cree Territory of James Bay is restricted to essential reasons (humanitarian, for work or to obtain health care). Those entering the regions are subject to conditions including a 14-day quarantine.

Ontario
Travellers arriving from another province or territory don't need to self-isolate unless they have COVID-19 symptoms.

In Thunder Bay, officials are asking residents to avoid all non-essential travel outside the region regardless of vaccination status.

Manitoba
Fully vaccinated:
"Travellers are not required to self-isolate. However, they are strongly advised to get a COVID-19 test on Day 1 of arrival, and again on Day 10."

Not fully vaccinated:
"With some exceptions, travellers must self-isolate for 14 days, regardless of test results or whether they are showing symptoms."

Manitoba also has a public health order in place restricting travel to northern Manitoba and remote communities.

Saskatchewan
Saskatchewan's website does not list any province-specific travel restrictions, but notes travellers returning from an out-of-province trip do not have to self-isolate.

However, passengers who travelled on flights with confirmed cases of COVID-19 are asked to self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days after their arrival.

Alberta
As with other provinces and territories, travellers in Alberta must follow federal requirements for travel within Canada.



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Manchin says he won't back Biden's spending bill that contains major trade irritant with Canada

Canada and other countries were hoping a U.S. senator might kill a controversial electric-vehicle tax credit that has angered America's trading partners.

Sen. Joe Manchin is now threatening not just to do that: he sounds like he's planning to torpedo the entire Build Back Better legislation that contains that provision as one of numerous measures that form the heart of the Democratic Party's priorities.

The moderate Democrat, who is key to President Joe Biden's hopes of passing the \$1.75-trillion US domestic investment bill, said on Sunday he would not support the package.

"I cannot vote to continue with this piece of legislation," Manchin said during an interview with the Fox News Sunday program, citing concerns about inflation. "Just can't. I have tried everything. It's just not possible."

The White House called Manchin's



Manchin's remarks a bunch of commitments he made to find common ground, and said it would find a way to move forward with the legislation in 2022.

"If his comments on FOX and written statement indicate an end to that effort, they represent a sudden and inexplicable reversal in his position, and a breach of his commitments to the President and the Senator's colleagues in the House and Senate," White House press secretary Jen

Pisani said in a statement. Canada and other countries have mounted a frantic lobbying effort to persuade U.S. senators to modify one single provision of that legislation involving vehicles.

ABC's Washington correspondent Alex Panetta breaks down the latest development in this Twitter thread: What they want changed is a tax credit that favours vehicle assembly in U.S. plants that use union labour,

primarily in Michigan. That plan, they argue, violates international trade agreements and would have a devastating effect on jobs in the auto sector in Canada and elsewhere.

They were especially hoping that Manchin might step in to limit or change it. It now sounds like what he's done instead is threaten his party's entire legislative agenda.

A key holdout
Many Democrats feel passage of the bill is essential to the party's chances of maintaining control of Congress in next year's elections.

The exchange marked the first sharp public break between the White House and a senator who many top allies of Biden privately regard as damaging the Democratic president's political future.

The White House had hoped to keep negotiations cordial and private in the hope of avoiding alienating the critical ally. Sunday's shift - a public rebuke of Manchin that revealed details of private talks - suggested a new phase in Biden's push for legislation he regards as essential to his legacy.

The West Virginia senator's comments drew outrage from liberal Democrats and Sen. Bernie Sanders, a democratic socialist who helped shape the bill and called for a vote to be held on the measure despite Manchin's opposition.

signs are seen in victims' behaviour. "More often than not, you're looking for signs that someone is withdrawing and being controlled," said Drydyk. "They might be really secretive about where they're going... who they're seeing and what's going on in their lives."

This can include pulling away from friends and family, or not being as engaged with school, said Drydyk. It can also involve the victim providing canned responses and not being honest about how they spend their time. Other common signs include cuts or bruises on the body, as well as some form of branding or tattoos.

Victims are also likely to be defensive or anxious towards having their personal devices identified, and often don't have access to identification.

Drydyk said that friends and family members of victims are especially crucial in helping victims get the help they need. This makes education to be able to recognize the signs of human trafficking especially important for these groups, in order to prevent it and supporting those impacted by it.

"They are instrumental both in terms of being able to see the signs and... have honest communication with the people that might be victims, but they're also important in terms of existing and accessing needed supports," she said.

But typically, the more telltale signs are seen in victims' behaviour. "More often than not, you're looking for signs that someone is withdrawing and being controlled," said Drydyk. "They might be really secretive about where they're going... who they're seeing and what's going on in their lives."

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

Tougher public health measures took effect in Quebec on Monday as the province announced a new single-day record of 4,571 new COVID-19 infections, while Ontario and Saskatchewan expanded access to third doses of vaccine.

As of 5 p.m. ET, Quebec is shutting down schools, bars, gyms and casinos. Restaurants must reduce capacity to 50 per cent, while working from home is being made mandatory again for all non-essential workers.

"The situation is critical. The explosion of cases is overwhelming," said Quebec Health Minister Christian Dubé in a news conference, appearing from home.

In neighbouring Ontario, people 18 and older are able to book a COVID-19 vaccine booster through the provincial portal as of Monday, as long as it has been at least three months since getting the second shot.

The province announced last Wednesday that it was expanding eligibility in an effort to bolster defences against the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. Pharmacies were able to start offering the boosters to younger adults on Friday, but now Ontarians can make appointments through the province's or a local public health unit's website.

Health officials in Ontario on Monday reported 3,794 new cases and no additional deaths. The update came as some struggled to book booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

In Ottawa, for example, the local public health unit announced early Monday that all available booster appointments were already booked.

The change in booster availability comes after the province tightened up restrictions. As of Sunday, indoor settings, retailers, gyms and other indoor settings in Ontario are only allowed to open at 50 per cent capacity. Indoor social gatherings are limited to a maximum of 10 people, while outdoor gatherings can only have 25.

Saskatchewan also opened booster shots Monday to eligible residents over the age of 18 and is reducing the time required between second and third doses to three months from five.



What's happening across Canada
In Atlantic Canada, Nova Scotia reported 485 new COVID-19 cases on Monday - the highest daily total the province has seen during the pandemic.

New Brunswick health officials reported 118 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, while Newfoundland and Labrador had 27 new cases. Health officials in Prince Edward Island reported 21 new cases on Monday.

"The timing couldn't be worse": impact from latest spike in COVID-19 cases felt throughout N.L. "2 Atlantic provinces commit to open borders, but 1 tightens up amid COVID-19 wave"

In the North, health officials in the Northwest Territories on Sunday reported the first confirmed case of the Omicron variant in the territory. Updated figures for all three territories are expected later Monday.

In the Prairies, Saskatchewan reported 59 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday. The province is also expanding access to boosters as of Monday, with everyone aged 18 and up allowed to book provided their second dose was at least three months ago.

Health officials in Manitoba reported 809 new cases since Friday, including 276 Saturday, 333 Sunday and 200 today.

Alberta was expected to report its weekend and Monday cases later in the day. "Saskatchewan premier reflects on pandemic choices in a challenging year" "Some elective surgeries in Winnipeg to be postponed for urgent, emergency procedures"



"75% of eligible population in Saskatchewan have full vaccine doses"

In British Columbia, health officials will provide updated figures covering the weekend later on Monday. The update will come as residents in the province see new restrictions imposed in the face of the fast-spreading Omicron variant.

The new COVID-19 restrictions range from audience capacities in large venues to the number of people able to attend indoor gatherings. Health officials say the restrictions, which also include the cancellation of all New Year's Eve parties, are being implemented over fears of the Omicron variant overwhelming B.C. hospitals.

What's happening around the world
As of early Monday afternoon, more than 274.8 million cases of COVID-19 had been reported worldwide, according to Johns Hopkins University's coronavirus database. The reported death toll worldwide stood at more than 5.3 million, according to the case-tracking tool.

The European Union's drugs regulator gave the green light Monday to a fifth COVID-19 vaccine for use in the 27-nation bloc, granting conditional marketing authorization to the two-dose vaccine made by U.S. biotech company Novavax.

The European Medicines Agency decision to grant conditional marketing authorization for the vaccine for people aged 18 and over, which must be confirmed by the EU's executive commission, comes as many European nations are battling surges in infections and amid concerns about the spread of the new Omicron variant.

Novavax says it currently is testing how shots will be used against the Omicron variant, and like other manufacturers has begun formulating an updated version to better match that variant in case it eventually needs.

Meanwhile, the Queen has decided not to gather the royal family for Christmas as the Royal Sandringham estate in eastern England, amid concerns about the fast-spreading omicron variant.

The royal palace said Monday that the 95-year-old queen will spend the holidays at Windsor Castle, where she has spent most of her time during the pandemic. Family members will visit, with precautions in place.

In Africa, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa is back at work after a period of self-isolation following a reported COVID-19 test, local media reported.

In the Asia-Pacific region, a cluster of coronavirus infections linked to a U.S. military base in Japan has grown to at least 180, Japan's government said on Monday, raising fears over the spread of the virus in the community.

In the Americas, Cuba has vaccinated more of its citizens against COVID-19 than most of the world's largest and richest nations, a milestone that will make the poor, communist-run country a test case as the Omicron variant begins to circle the globe. The Caribbean island has vaccinated more than 90 per cent of its population with at least one dose, and 83 per cent of the population has two doses.

Peru detected its first cases of Omicron, as in the United States, senators Elizabeth Warren and Cory Booker said they both tested positive for COVID-19 and were experiencing mild symptoms.

In the Middle East, Iran has confirmed its first case of Omicron, while authorities urged Iranians to get their booster doses in the Middle East's worst-hit country.

Meanwhile, Kuwait has mandated that everyone who has been vaccinated against the coronavirus at least nine months ago receive a booster shot. The Gulf Arab state said that booster shots will become compulsory starting Jan. 2 as the Omicron variant courses across the region. Kuwait detected its first Omicron case earlier this month.

The tiny sheikhdom has seen cases hitting record lows of under 50 infections a day. The government also urged all citizens and residents to avoid travel.

Most Canadians say they can't tell if someone is a victim of human trafficking: survey

A majority of Canadian adults don't feel they can recognize the signs of human trafficking, according to a new survey conducted on behalf of The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking.

According to the survey conducted by Angus Reid, 77 per cent of respondents said they would not be able to tell whether someone is a victim of human trafficking. The survey took place from Nov. 15 to 17 and involved a sample of 1,514 Canadians.

Still, 79 per cent of Canadians said they are concerned that human trafficking is a significant issue in Canada, according to a separate survey also conducted on behalf of the centre. This online survey was conducted by NielsenIQ in September and involved 1,503 Canadians.

Julia Drydyk is the executive director of The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, based in Toronto. The results of both surveys highlight

the critical need for public education on human trafficking, she said.

"If people aren't educated about what human trafficking really looks like in Canada, they're going to be looking for all the wrong things," Drydyk told CTV News Channel on Sunday. "[Education] is so vital."

Drydyk said that many Canadians continue to have the perception that human trafficking mostly involves people from other countries being shipped across borders and into Canada. In reality, she described human trafficking as a domestic issue.

"Despite border closures and lockdowns, human trafficking continues to be alive and well in Canada," she said. "Over 90 per cent of victims and survivors in Canada are Canadian women and girls, and more often than not the traffickers are also Canadian."

According to Statistics Canada, 95 per cent of human trafficking victims in 2019 were girls and women, while

89 per cent of victims were under the age of 35. Between 2009 and 2019, nearly 2,500 incidents of human trafficking were reported. The majority of these cases (66 per cent) were reported in Ontario, with a total of 1,624 incidents. Meanwhile, at least 29 per cent of these cases involved crossing the Canadian border.

Even with these statistics, the actual scope of human trafficking in Canada is still believed to be underestimated. IDENTIFYING THE SIGNS
When trying to tell whether or not someone is a victim of human trafficking, Drydyk pointed to a multitude of signs to look for. The more obvious indicators can be an older boyfriend or group of friends for young women, as well as wearing expensive clothing or receiving gifts that "don't quite make sense," said Drydyk.

But typically, the more telltale

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Bigg Boss 15: Ritesh Singh and Rajiv Adatia gets evicted from the show for receiving least number of votes

While the Weekend Ka Vaar is full of fun and entertainment, the eliminations are the bone in the throat of the house members. This weekend episode witnessed host Salman Khan shocking everyone with a double eviction. The two contestants who were evicted were Rajiv Adatia and Ritesh Singh. Interestingly, both Rajiv and Ritesh were the wild card entries in the season and have received the least votes from the viewers this week. After more than a 6-week stay in the house, Rajiv's journey was out short. Rajiv had an extremely entertaining stint in show. He entered with his strategy of divide and rule, oblivious of the fact that the tide might turn against him in the later stage. He made some good friends and had his share of beautiful moments in this season, and his absence will be felt as the 'Ticket To Finale' success story.



After being reprimanded by host Salman Khan for his unacceptable behaviour towards Rakhi this past week, due to lesser numbers of votes, Ritesh's journey too ends in the house. The nominees along with him were Karan, Tejaswi, Umar, Ritesh, Nishant, and Abhijit.

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan summoned by the ED for questioning in the Panama Papers case

Actor Aishwarya Rai Bachchan has been summoned by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for questioning in Delhi in a case linked to the Panama Papers case. The actress was one among the several high-profile personalities named in the 2016 Panama Papers leak. This is the first time that the ED has summoned a name on the list hence confirming that they are actively pursuing the case against the Bachchans. Reportedly, the Bachchans have an offshore entity, Amic Partners Limited, incorporated by them in 2005. This is the third time that Aishwarya Rai Bachchan has been issued a summons by the central agency. The ED had issued summons to the actress two times previously but she had sought more time. The ED has been investigating the case since 2016 and had issued notices to the Bachchan family asking them to explain foreign remittances since 2004 under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) of the RBI. As per reports, over Rs. 20,000 crore worth of undeclared assets has been detected by the Income Tax authorities in connection with the Panama Papers investigation.

Australia name unchanged squad for final three Ashes Tests



Australia named an unchanged 15-man squad for the three remaining Ashes Tests against England Monday with captain Pat Cummins and fast bowling partner Josh Hazlewood rejoining the team in Melbourne later this week. The home team resisted any changes after a nine-wicket win in the first Test at Brisbane and their impressive performance with the bat and ball in Adelaide, where they were closing in on victory. Cummins, the world's number one Test bowler, missed the day-night Test this week after being a close contact of a positive Covid case at Adelaide's arena. He was supposed to isolate in the South Australia capital for seven days but was permitted to return to Sydney on a private charter flight. Hazlewood was ruled out with a side strain, with Bryce Richardson and Michael Neser replacing them in the starting eleven in Adelaide. The third Test in Melbourne starts on December 26. Australia: Pat Cummins (capt), Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Marcus Trescothick, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Neser, Bryce Richardson, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Mitchell Swainson, David Warner.

New Zealand to visit Pakistan twice in 2022-23, PCB confirms

On Monday, New Zealand Cricket has confirmed it will tour Pakistan for two Tests and three ODIs in December/January 2022-23 as part of the Future Tours Programme and will return in April 2023 for 10 white-ball matches to make-up for the September 2021 abandoned tour, the Pakistan Cricket Board declared. The arrangement was finalized following meetings and discussions between the PCB and NZC Chairpersons Mr Ramiz Raja and Mr Martin Snodden, respectively. The two Tests and three ODIs will be part of the ICC World Test Championship and ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League, respectively, while the second visit will include two additional ODIs and will now comprise five ODIs and five T20Is that will count towards the ICC Rankings. With details of the tours and matches now confirmed, the two boards will continue to work together to finalise the series dates, which will be announced in due course. PCB Chairman Ramiz Raja maintained: "I am pleased with the outcomes of our discussions and negotiations, and thank Martin Snodden and his board for their understanding and support. This reflects the strong, cordial and historic relations between the two boards and reflects Pakistan's status as an important member of the cricket family." NZC Chief Executive David White added: "Our respective chairmen Ramiz Raja and Martin Snodden, had very fruitful and constructive discussions while the news, further strengthening the bond between the two organizations. It's good to be going back."

Makers of Ranveer Singh starrer 83 paid original winning team approx. Rs. 15 cr. to share their stories; Kapil Dev paid around Rs. 5 cr.

The upcoming sports biopic 83 starring Ranveer Singh has been making headlines. The film produced by Reliance Entertainment that tells the story of the 1983 Cricket World Cup win, has been one of the most quickly awaited releases. Now, just a week before the film hits screens Bollywood Hungama has managed to get an inside scoop on how the makers bagged the rights of the story. As per a reliable source, we hear that Reliance Entertainment shelled out approximately Rs. 15 cr. to the winning team of which approx. Rs. 5 cr. went to cricket legend Kapil Dev himself. Revealing details about the acquisition of the rights for 83, an industry insider told Bollywood Hungama exclusively, "Before making the film it is important to



While the film is slated to release on December 24, reports suggest that 83 has been made on a budget of approximately Rs. 125 cr. Starring Ranveer Singh as Kapil Dev, Deepika Padukone as his wife Roni Bhatia, Pankaj Tripathi, Tabir Raj Bhatia, Saqib Saleem, Jatin Sarna, Chirag Patil, Dinker Sharma, Nishant Dahiya, and Harshy Sandhu among others the film is directed by Kabir Khan.

England on brink of 2nd Test defeat as Root falls in final over

ADELAIDE: Joe Root fell in the final over of the fourth day Sunday to leave England in deep trouble at 82 for four chasing a massive 468 to win the second Ashes Test and needing a history-making miracle to avoid slumping 2-0 down in the series. No team has ever posted such a big score in a fourth innings to win in the history of Test cricket - with the West Indies 418 for seven in beating Steve Waugh's Australia at St John's in 2003 the highest. It is an even harder task at the Adelaide Oval, where Australia's 315 for six to defeat England in 1902 remains the best fourth-innings run chase. England's problems stem from losing seven wickets for 86 runs as they collapsed to 236 all out on Saturday in reply to Australia's 473 for nine declared. They reached the close with ailing skipper Root out in the last over of the day, leaving Ben Stokes unbeaten on three. England are still 386 runs adrift, facing the near impossible task of batting three sessions on the final day to salvage a draw with only six wickets left and the world's number one ranked Test batsman, Root, back in the pavilion. The hosts resumed their second innings at 45 for one and declared on 230 for five before tea, giving their bowlers a crack at England with the pink ball as twilight loomed. They immediately made inroads with Bryce Richardson steering into the Hassel-Hameed and the ball flying off his glove to wicketkeeper Alex Carey without scoring. Misfielding: Then Dawid Malan, who hit 80 in the first innings, was trapped low by Michael Neser for 20. Openers Rory Burns was desperate for a big score after a lean spell and managed 34, but was then beaten by Richardson's sheer pace, edging to Smith at slip. Root hurt his abdomen during a warm-up and missed the evening 85 minutes while he went for a scan. He appeared mostly untroubled while batting but late in the day took a nasty blow in the same, sensitive, area from Mitchell Starc to leave him writhing in agony.

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Quebec shuts down schools, bars, gyms and more as COVID-19 case counts soar

Quebec is closing schools, bars, gyms and movie theatres as public health officials race to slow the spread of the Omicron variant.

Quebec Health Minister Christian Dubé said in the face of the variant, which appears to be doubling its spread every couple days, the government had to take action to prevent the health-care system from being overwhelmed.

"The epidemiological situation is critical. The community spread is astounding," said Dubé during the Monday news conference, appearing from home alongside public health director Dr. Horacio Arruda and Daniel Paré, who is in charge of Quebec's vaccination campaign.

"Our health system is already in crisis ... and things aren't getting better. Hospitalizations and intensive care unit admissions are on the rise."

Schools close
Elementary and high schools will close at the end of the day Monday, with students only set to return to in-person learning on Jan. 10. That

means primary school students will have a longer holiday, and high school students will switch to remote learning when classes are set to resume in the New Year.

Adult and professional education centres will also close.

Elementary school buildings will remain open only for vaccination campaigns and the distribution of rapid test kits. School daycare services will also continue to operate for parents who need them, prioritizing parents who work in the health-care sector. Private and provincially-run daycares will also remain open.

Bars, gyms, movie theatres, concert venues and spas must close as of 5 p.m. Monday. Restaurants will have to reduce their capacity to 50 per cent and limit their hours from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. Professional sports games will have to be played without spectators.

Working from home is now being mandated for all non-essential workers, including civil servants. The

provincial government is pausing all ministerial public activities, such as news conferences that are not related to COVID-19.

"Limit your contacts"
Dubé said more measures could be announced in the coming days.

Gatherings of up to 10 people from a maximum of three households are still permitted, but not recommended - and that number could change, officials warned.

"What we're asking is that you limit your contacts to absolute minimum," said the health minister.

Hours before the announcement, Quebec reported a record number of cases for the past 24 hours, with 4,571 new cases, three more deaths and 21 more people in hospital.

Hospitalizations, at 397, are already higher than half of the province's capacity, which is at 671. Dubé said the system's low capacity is not due to a lack of beds, but a serious lack of personnel, many of whom are on leave or have left altogether.

Though the severity of the disease

caused by the Omicron variant is not fully known, its high rate of transmission will lead to more hospitalizations in a short amount of time, no matter what, Dubé said.

"We are eight million people in Quebec. We are at war. We're at war right now against this virus," he said. "This is du jamais vu, this has never been seen before. It's unbelievable. The only way to manage this crisis is to react as quickly as possible with the resources that are available."

Certain populations prioritized for boosters

Several hospitals are once again postponing non-urgent surgeries.

Lana's Châ-de-la-Saint-Hospital has reported two outbreaks, with a total of six employees testing positive so far.

Thursday, projections from the provincial government health-care research institute, INESSS, showed as many as 700 Quebecers could be hospitalized due to the virus by early January, with about 160 of them in intensive care.

Paré, the head of the province's vaccination campaign, says Quebec is trying to speed up third-dose vaccinations, but needs more people to get the shots and is prioritizing older populations, health-care workers, at-risk populations and long-term-care residents.

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Though the severity of the disease

Federal government deposited nearly \$26 million in the wrong bank accounts last year

The federal government deposited nearly \$26 million into the wrong bank accounts during the last fiscal year - and more than \$10 million of it may be gone for good.

According to figures tabled in the House of Commons, the government sent 22,170 direct deposits to the wrong bank accounts between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021. In the previous fiscal year, it deposited 9,619 payments worth a total \$6.6 million into the wrong accounts.

The number of cases reported during the 2020-2021 fiscal year is the highest since at least 2012. The total amount paid into the wrong accounts - \$25.9 million - is much higher than the figure reported for the previous year and is the second largest annual amount of misdirected cash reported since at least 2009.

While the government was able to recover \$7.1 million in misdirected payments last year, another mislaid \$10.2 million is listed in government documents as "not expected to be recovered."

The government says it hopes to chase down and recover another \$6.6 million in coming years.

The largest single payment misdirected last year - for \$3.5 million - was recovered by the federal government.

With billions of dollars in federal government direct deposit payments of all types being made each year, a small percentage of them inevitably end up in the wrong places.

Conservative Treasury Board critic Kelly McCauley said his office has received a lot of calls from constituents whose benefit payments never arrived and who couldn't get through to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), which oversees many pandemic benefit programs.

"The difficulty was trying to get through to CRA for months and months," said McCauley, MP for Edmonton West.

The government says the spike in the number of payments going astray is due to the large rise in the number of payments going to individual Canadians because of the pandemic.

"There was a significant increase in payments issued from April 1, 2020 up to March 31, 2021 to individuals and businesses as a result of the actions taken by the government to support hardship created by the COVID-19 pandemic," wrote Stéphanie Hamel, spokesperson for Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC). The department includes the Receiver General's office, which oversees government payments.

"In 2020 to 2021, the Receiver General issued 405 million direct deposits for a value of \$494 billion," Hamel continued. "This represents an annual increase of 35 per cent and 56 per cent respectively."

Hamel said the misdirected deposits amounted to only 0.005 per cent of the total paid out.

Israel to ban travel to U.S., Canada over Omicron variant

JERUSALEM - Israeli ministers on Monday agreed to ban travel to the United States, Canada and eight other countries amid the rapid, global spread of the Omicron variant.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office announced the decision following a Cabinet vote.

The rare move to red-list the U.S. comes amid rising coronavirus infections in Israel and marks a change to pandemic practices between the two nations with close diplomatic relations. The U.S. will join a growing list of European countries and other destinations to which Israelis are barred from travelling, and from which returning travellers must remain in quarantine.

A parliamentary committee is expected to give the measure final approval. Once authorized, the travel ban will take effect at midnight Wednesday morning.

Israel has seen a surge in new cases of the more infectious coronavirus variant in recent weeks, and began closing its borders and restricting travel in late November. Foreign nationals are not allowed to enter, and all Israelis arriving from overseas are required to quarantine - including people whose are vaccinated.

Other countries that were approved to be added to the travel ban starting Wednesday are Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Switzerland and Turkey.

Israel rolled out a world-leading vaccination campaign early this year, and more than 4.1 million of Israel's 9.3 million people have received a third dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

New COVID-19 restrictions in effect for parts of Canada; some productions cancelled

Tougher public health restrictions come into effect Monday in many parts of Canada as some regions are dealing with concerning COVID-19 case counts and rising hospitalizations.

In Quebec, the province announced 4,571 COVID-19 infections - a new single day record.

Bars, restaurants, retail stores, places of worship and entertainment activities in the province must now operate at half capacity, while all sports tournaments and competitions are suspended until further notice.

The government also backtracked on increasing the maximum number of people allowed at indoor gatherings to 20 over Christmas. It has kept the limit at 10 people.

New capacity restrictions are also in place in British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador to help curb the spread of COVID-19 and the Omicron variant.

B.C. has capped capacity for bars



and restaurants at 50 per cent, while Newfoundland and Labrador has limited bars to 50 per cent capacity and restaurants to 75 per cent with physical distancing.

Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s provincial health officer, said the restrictions will last for the next six weeks.

Ontario implemented its new public health orders Sunday, which see restaurants, retailers, gyms and other indoor settings operating at 50 per cent capacity.

While theatres are allowed to keep their doors open, some production companies in Ontario are cancelling shows to contend with the rise in COVID-19 cases driven by the Omicron variant.

In Ottawa, plans to bring the acclaimed "Hamilton" musical to the National Arts Centre's Southam Hall next month have been postponed until July.

Plans to premiere the eagerly anticipated Tom Stoppard play "Leopoldstadt" in North America in

early 2022 have been cancelled. Theatre producer David Mirvish issued a statement saying the "sudden arrival" of the variant made it impossible to move forward.

"I'm not giving up on 'Leopoldstadt.' I'm determined to present this magnificent play in Toronto sometime in the future when it is safe to do so," he said.

Meanwhile, adults in Ontario who want to book a COVID-19 vaccine booster may have to wait more than a week for an appointment as many health regions say bookings were snarled up Monday morning.

The province has expanded eligibility for booster shots to those ages 18 and older, as long as it has been at least three months since their second shot, due to rising case numbers and the threat of the Omicron variant.

Health Minister Christine Elliott's office said more than 125,000 third-dose appointments had been booked through the province's online portal as of 10 a.m., but that number doesn't include those booked through pharmacies, local public health units and other channels.

"We are pleased to see so many people embracing the opportunity to ensure strong protection against the Omicron variant," said Alexandra Hilkene, a spokeswoman for Elliott.

With Omicron, Canada's small businesses again face sweeping restrictions

As the December holidays neared, the Old Triangle alleehouses across the Maritimes were bustling with Christmas parties and diners revelling in the festive season.

But that energy vanished in recent days as the Omicron variant of COVID-19 raged across Canada and governments brought in new restrictions limiting the capacity at restaurants and enforcing physical distance between patrons.

"It was really, really, really depressing," said Brendan Doherty, one of the Old Triangle's owners, of the moment he heard his business would be subject to new rules.

"There's been a few dark moments through the pandemic, and that one really felt like one of the darker, even though we've been dealing with this for two

years."

Doherty, like most other small business owners, is lamenting how the "most wonderful time of the year" has become a nightmare of mounting case counts, capacity restrictions or closures and worries many variant were long gone when COVID-19 cases receded over the summer and fall.

They now fear they'll have to shut down once more, lay off staff and perhaps even say goodbye to their businesses for good.

While the Old Triangle is doing its best to stay open through the latest wave of COVID-19, Doherty said even that is a difficult feat and he's already had to reduce operating hours.

"With the current guidelines around testing and isolation in our province, I've got half of my

kitchen staff in isolation, and it doesn't look like they're going to get ... test results before Christmas at this point," he said.

"As far as Christmas around here, it's pretty dark and it's a pretty sad day."

The outlook is just as gloomy at Louis Cifer Brew Works and Stout Irish Pub in Toronto.

Before restrictions even came into effect, owner and president Erin Gamelin says between 30 and 40 per cent business dried up as Canadians backed away from dining out amid the threat of Omicron.

"It's almost like we don't have to manage only having 50 per cent capacity, because customers are taking it upon themselves to cancel," she said.

On Saturday, her establishments were booked full with reservations. All but one cancelled.

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