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Return-to-school decisions still not so clearcut because of COVID cases

As a woman with quadriplegia, Emily Silva says her lungs aren't as strong as other people's. Her youngest daughter will head into her first year of high school this fall. Silva doesn't want to keep her home and have her miss out on forming important social connections, although she can't help but worry about what will happen if COVID-19 finds its way into her home.

Silva and her family live in Woodstock. They're careful; they don't go out to eat, and they still wear masks. In 2020, long before children could get vaccinated, Silva pulled her youngest daughter out of school, sending her back in the 2021-22 year after she'd been vaccinated.

Two years later, and even with vaccines, Silva once again feels anxious about sending her daughter to school, especially without having more updated information from the province about COVID-19 cases and what parents should expect for the school year ahead.

"I'm pretty apprehensive," she said. "There seems to be absolutely no precautions."

Silva said she doesn't expect the province to bring back a mask mandate, but she'd like more information about what back to school is going to be like. Some precautions could include teachers keeping a box of masks on hand for students who have symptoms, or providing rapid tests for kids who feel sick.

About 20% of kids 12 to 19 have had 3rd dose.

She'd also like to know what vaccination statistics are like for kids in her daughter's age group, and especially third dose numbers. A vaccination

campaign before school starts would also help put her mind at ease, she said.

"We don't have information or tools to judge our risk or reduce our risk," she said.

The Department of Education told CBC News that unless Public Health implements new policies, students will return to school in September the way they left them in June.

The department also said that 87.3 per cent of children aged 12 to 19 years had their first dose as of July 19, while 81.9 per cent had their second dose.

The department also said that 87.3 per cent of children aged 12 to 19 years had their first dose as of July 19, while 81.9 per cent had their second dose.

The spokesperson said 56.7 per cent of children aged 11 years had their first dose as of July 19, while 40.1 per cent have had their second dose.

Better ventilation
 The province did promise to install new ventilation systems in 11 schools this year. According to the Department of Education, 10 of those projects are now underway, while one has been delayed until next year.

Silva feels frustrated because, as a person who's already spent years feeling restricted because of being in a wheelchair, she feels she's being restricted all over again; only this time, no one cares.

When the pandemic first started, Silva said, it felt like everyone was supportive of each other. Now restrictions are gone, but as someone who's at higher risk of suffering severe consequences of the virus and with cases once again on the rise, Silva wishes there was more acknowledgement that COVID-19 is still here.

"It feels like a lot of people think it's just no big deal," she said.

She said she knows people have to learn to live with the virus, but she pointed out she doesn't have enough information from the province to do that. Learning to live with COVID-19 is difficult for some people than others, depending on level of the vulnerability.

"All parents should be concerned about the effects of COVID infection on their children, especially repeated ones, when we do not know the long-term effects?"

Not knowing COVID-19's long-term effects is also on the mind of Rachel Kaleva, a mother of two in Fredericton.

In the spring, she spoke with CBC News about how she decided to home-school her oldest child after school dropped the mask mandate.

"That was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak," she said.

Looking toward September, she's decided to continue home-schooling. Her oldest child is fully vaccinated, and her youngest is now eligible to get vaccinated, but Kaleva's biggest concern is "long-haul COVID-19."

Catching COVID-19 multiple times and having persistent symptoms is worrying, Kaleva said, especially without knowing what the long-term effects will be.

"I know, we can't remove the risks, but we're trying to mitigate them the best we can," she said.

"Until we actually move to a real endemic stage, where we know how to live with this more safely than having we're doing right now, I'm having a hard time wrapping my mind around sending my kids back to public school classrooms."

Shifting to EVs is not enough. The deeper problem is our car dependence



Electric vehicles tend to produce fewer emissions over their life cycles than equivalent vehicles powered by fossil fuels, but the framing often used by government and industry that they are "zero-emissions" is misleading. Unlike a conventional vehicle whose emissions come from burning fossil fuels, a greater share of an EV's emissions comes from its production; more specifically, its battery. This is the side of the EV that often doesn't make it into the ad campaigns.

The International Energy Agency estimates that there will need to be a significant increase in mineral extraction to fuel a green transition that places emphasis on EVs over alternatives like public transit and cycling. For example, demand for lithium is expected to soar by 4,200 per cent and cobalt by 2,100 per cent.

Greenwashing operations
 Those figures sound great to the mining industry, which hopes to use EVs to greenwash its operations, but they have severe human and environmental consequences throughout the supply chain.

The "lithium triangle" in South America is poised to be a significant source of the mineral, but already it's polluting the water and lowering the country's access for local communities.

Meanwhile, the site of much of the world's cobalt extraction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) experiences high rates of birth defects, contaminated water, and around 40,000 children are believed to work in artisanal mines. In 2019, electric carmaker Tesla was among a number of companies named in a lawsuit over child deaths at cobalt mines in the DRC.

But this isn't just happening abroad. Part of the prime minister's pitch for Canada to be a global EV leader is to increase mining as well. Lithium mines in Quebec have already been responsible for environmental accidents and subject to community opposition, while Indigenous opposition is already mounting over plans to exploit the Ring of Fire in Ontario. We're sure to see more as provinces across the country look for mineral deposits to exploit.

In 2019, transportation accounted for 25 per cent of national emissions, second only to oil and gas, and that had grown by 54 per cent since 1990, in part because people were driving more and buying big trucks and SUVs instead of sedans. There's a need to address the transport sector's emissions, but the problem goes beyond tailpipe emissions.

According to Statistics Canada, 73.7 per cent of Canadians live in urban areas, but the majority are in the suburbs, not the downtown core, and those suburbs keep growing. That reality is the product of decades of government policy that incentivized suburban living and prioritized cars above other forms of mobility.

A study released in January found that 83 per cent of Canadians own or lease a vehicle, and 81 per cent of car owners felt it would be impossible not to because so many of our communities have been built to deny residents a reliable alternative. Those suburban communities also have higher carbon footprints than denser urban areas.

But car dependence isn't just an environmental problem. In 2020, an estimated 1,745 people died in motor vehicle collisions and another 7,868 people sustained serious injuries. Commute times are also getting longer in Canadian cities, and sitting in a car is associated with a whole range of adverse health impacts.

On top of that, owning a car is more expensive than many people realize. Before the pandemic, inflation and soaring fuel costs, the Canadian Automotive Association estimated the annual cost of vehicle ownership was between \$8,600 and \$13,000, depending on the model. It's surely higher now.

An unprecedented opportunity
 The climate crisis offers us an unprecedented opportunity to re-imagine how we move and how we build our communities, but the push for electric vehicles is about making the smallest possible change - one that likely won't deliver the scale of emissions reductions we need. Meeting the scale of that challenge requires taking on the dominance of cars in our communities.

The federal government has increased transit funding, but much of the money won't flow until 2026 and beyond. Meanwhile, subways in the major cities need expansions to keep up with demand, municipal bus systems need operations funding to provide a more frequent and reliable service, and many Canadian cities lack proper cycling infrastructure.

Similarly, the Liberals finally approved VIA Rail's high-frequency rail plan between Toronto and Quebec City after five years of delay, but even then it won't arrive until the early 2030s. And it still won't match the high-speed rail being built in countries across Asia and Europe. The ambition we need simply isn't there.

Electric vehicles will be part of the solution, but the deeper problem is how many Canadians are dependent on their cars with no reliable alternatives. Governments serious about climate action need to change that.

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Several ServiceOntario employees charged in theft of hundreds of vehicles

Police say they've charged 28 people in Ontario and Saskatchewan, including several ServiceOntario employees, following an investigation into the fraudulent modification and sale of hundreds of stolen vehicles.

In a news release Thursday, Ontario Provincial Police said they began an investigation in September 2020 after uncovering an alleged auto theft network that they say was modifying stolen vehicles' identification numbers in order to sell them through private sales.

The thefts occurred mainly in Ontario, police said.

Through the investigation dubbed "Project MYRA," police say they recovered 214 vehicles valued at more than \$12 million. A wide range of stolen vehicle makes and models were recovered, including high-end vehicles.

Honda and Acura accounted for 37 percent of the vehicles recovered.

Police identified three alleged auto theft criminal organizations involved



in the thefts, including one in Peel Region, one in Durham Region and Toronto, and another in York Region.

They noted that employees of ServiceOntario are accused of assisting with the illegitimate registration of stolen vehicles.

The investigation is ongoing.

Firearms, drugs among items seized
From these searches, police said they seized six firearms, large quantities of drugs including more than 200 grams of suspected fentanyl and 1,840 grams of suspected cocaine, and large sums of money, among other things.

The OPP say 28 people have been charged with 242 offences, including charges related to the Criminal Code, the Cannabis Act and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Five of the accused were being held in custody, while the remaining were released and scheduled to appear in court on various dates in July and August 2022, they added.

"Project MYRA has been an extensive operation, and police continue to identify and locate re-vinced vehicles associated with these criminal organizations," the police forecast.

In a statement, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery said the province takes these matters "extremely seriously" and is working with police "to support their investigation."

"We do not speak to matters that are part of an active police investigation or matters before the court."

The WHO says we must work together to fight monkeypox. African doctors are skeptical

As an infectious diseases specialist in Atlanta, Dr. Boghuma Kabisen Titanji spent much of 2020 on the front lines of the COVID-19 battle raging in the U.S.

When a vaccine arrived in December that year, she felt some relief. But also, fear.

"I had seen what COVID was capable of doing to people the age of my parents," Titanji said. "I was absolutely terrified because from the moment I had access to vaccination up until the moment my parents had access to vaccination, it was eight months."

In Cameroon, where Titanji is from, her parents didn't get a first coronavirus jab until August 2021. By that time, most Canadian and American adults were well past their second shots.

"It was the most nerve wracking experience of living in fear that they would get COVID," she said.

The World Health Organization's pleas to rich countries to stop stockpiling COVID vaccines and share with the lower-income nations - particularly in Africa - global health experts agree that we failed.

They also aren't surprised, because the same inequitable distribution of vaccines and treatments has been a pattern for decades.

On July 23, the WHO declared monkeypox a "public health emergency of international concern" - and doctors fear the same pattern will repeat itself in Canada, the U.S. and European countries rush to vaccinate at-risk populations.

They're using a vaccine originally manufactured for smallpox, which has been eradicated. In Canada, it's called Imvamune, and small quantities were stockpiled years ago in case smallpox ever returned. Imvamune is also approved to vaccinate people against monkeypox.

Yet monkeypox has been endemic in several African nations for 50 years. Dozens have died this year alone, Titanji said, but no vaccine has ever been made available, except for targeted studies involving health-care



workers.

When she dealt with monkeypox outbreaks in Cameroon, she said there was also no access to antivirals to treat the disease.

"If you diagnose someone with monkeypox [in Africa], you provide supportive care. So basically, you make the diagnosis and you tell them to isolate and, you know, take paracetamol for their fever ... and to rest and recover."

Although anyone can become infected through close contact with someone who has monkeypox or with personal items like bed linens, in countries outside Africa, the most at-risk population right now is men who have sex with men. In Africa, it has historically been spread primarily through contact with infected animals.

Lack of concern for illness in Africa
If a pandemic the scale of COVID didn't galvanize a global response that was equitable, Titanji said, she's skeptical that the response to monkeypox - not to mention future outbreaks of other diseases - will treat Africans differently.

"The issue is that there has been a generalized neglect of health equity in Africa," said Dr. Githinji Gitahi, head of Amref Health Africa, a group based in Nairobi, Kenya, working to improve health-care access across the continent.

"The view is that as long as the health threats are limited to African communities, it is all right for the world not to worry."

But if rich countries want to end epidemics that affect their own citizens, it's in their best interest to

Gitahi added.

The path to even the playing field for low and middle-income countries, according to some experts, is to remove intellectual property protections on essential vaccines and treatments.

Rich countries invest enormous amounts of money in vaccine manufacturing companies during emergencies, said Titanji. That gives them leverage to make funding contingent on giving lower and middle income countries an equal chance to buy them at a fair price, she said.

But an even better solution, experts said, is to make sure Africa is able to mount its own emergency responses to epidemics, rather than being forced to wait for charities and rich nations to act.

"If we want to build a resilient system, there is much, much, much to do beyond just the donation of vaccines," said Dr. Mary Stephen, technical officer with the Health Emergencies Program at the WHO Regional Office in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.

"Just imagine if ... countries on the continent were able to produce their own PPE, were able to produce their lab reagents, their test kits. [If] they were able to produce vaccines, medicines ... it will go a long way," she said.

An important step in building that self-reliance has been the opening of the "mRNA Vaccine Hub for Africa" in Capetown, South Africa, supported by WHO. Scientists there have produced its first batches of COVID-19 mRNA vaccine.

As Africa works toward health care self-sufficiency, it's important for the world to remember that the continent has already made significant contributions to global health, Titanji said.

For instance, African participants in many clinical trials have enabled the development of HIV/AIDS treatments received by patients in rich countries, she said.

Now that the world is confronted with monkeypox, Africa has decades of knowledge about the virus that wealthy nations are relying on, Titanji said.

"It's 50 years of research by African scientists, sometimes with incredible challenges to publish this data," she said of monkeypox studies, including one on health-care workers in Congo that tested the effectiveness of the Imvamune vaccine.

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Single-income earners are being priced out of Canada's housing market

There are signs that the unprecedented landscape of Canada's housing market is heading in the opposite direction.

The national average price of a home in Canada hit a record high in February - \$316,620 - representing a 20 per cent spike compared to the same time last year.

But it appears February's record may also represent a peak in the national home-price average.

A new report from the Royal Bank of Canada's Robert Hogue is warning of a dramatic "correction" to a market that has seen homes selling a significant level above asking prices, pricing out prospective homebuyers.

Hogue's report noted that the correction is just beginning, with home prices expected to reach lower levels than RBC anticipated earlier this year.

"We project home results to fall nearly 25 per cent this year and 15 per cent next year in Canada," Hogue wrote in a July 22 release.



For Halifax realtor Richard Payne, the housing market forecast is a good thing for single-income home buyers.

"That's been the biggest challenge for everybody," he explained. If you're just looking at a single income, how do you afford an average-priced house in some of those bigger markets across the whole of Canada, but more specifically in Atlantic Canada?

Payne, responding to a new report by online company Zoocasa that analyzed 20 housing markets across Canada to find the most affordable regions and property types for single-income buyers, said there has been a huge influx of buyers scooping up properties all over Atlantic Canada due to - primarily - affordability.

He noted that while listings remain slim, the next couple of months historically brings in a rise in homeowneship, putting up the pressure sale.

"A lot of the realtors that are

working with buyers are keeping our fingers crossed that we're going to see some more inventory show up, which will make things a little bit easier because it won't be you and 15 other people trying to buy the same house," he said.

The Zoocasa survey concluded that Regina, Saskatchewan, was the most affordable city in the country for a single-income buyer, with an average home price of \$322,800. Because the median income in the region is nearly \$10,000 higher than the income required to put a down payment on a house, it's financially feasible for single-income earners to consider buying a home.

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saint John, New Brunswick, weren't far behind.

One Maritime city that didn't make the top five was Halifax, where the average house is selling for \$356,000. With a median income of \$49,000, it's becoming increasingly difficult to find a home on a single income in the region.

"We're finding the majority of buyers, unless you're a first-time homebuyer or you're a downsizing retiree, ideally, you're looking for a single-family home and not necessarily a condo," he said, pointing out that housing affordability also largely depends on the type of home buyers are seeking.

This week, from 507 last week a "trend of increasing deaths since the beginning of Wave 1" is now evident.

"The number of severe outcomes reported in future weeks may increase, as these outcomes are lagging indicators," it warned.

The latest data released by the ministry is in line with wastewater surveillance performed by the Ontario Science Advisory Table, which is showing a slight reduction in viral activity in some parts of Ontario, including the Greater Toronto Area.

Members of the science advisory table, it should be noted, were among the first to sound the alarm about a summertime wave driven by the BA.5 variant back on July 6.

In its report, Public Health Ontario said that case rates are still on the ascent in four regions but are declining in three other regions. It said that the number of outbreaks in the handful of settings with widespread access to PCR testing also declined 16 per cent over the last week.

"Fewer outbreaks were reported this week compared to last week in group homes/supervisory housing (36% decrease), long-term care homes (20% decrease), and retirement homes (11% decrease). Hospitals, correctional facilities, and shelters reported a similar number of outbreaks this week compared to last week," it said.

Growth in COVID-19 hospitalizations slows in Ontario, but officials say trend of increasing deaths now 'evident'

A summertime wave of the COVID-19 pandemic may be in the early stages of plateauing, with the latest data showing little or no change in most public health indicators over the last week.

The Ministry of Health says that there are now 1,492 people in hospitals testing positive for COVID-19, compared to 1,483 at this time last week. Of those people, 138 are in intensive care.

The pace of the increase marks a significant departure from last Thursday when COVID-19 hospitalizations had risen by more than 50 per cent week-over-week.

Other public health indicators are also showing signs of plateauing after being on the rise since mid-June.

Over the last seven days an average of 1,701 new cases of the disease caused by the novel coronavirus were



confirmed through PCR testing each day, virtually unchanged from the previous seven-day period (1,697).

That's compared to a nearly 18 per cent week-over-week increase last Thursday.

In its latest epidemiological

summary, also released today, Public Health Ontario points out that case rates are nonetheless still on the rise in 25 of Ontario's 34 public health units. The arms-length government organization also said that while hospital admissions decreased to 402

Could Canada follow the U.S.'s economic decline? Here's what experts say

Call it a tale of two economies: the latest figures from Statistics Canada on Friday show economic growth in the country slowed but likely avoided a decline through the first half of the year, just as the United States reported its second consecutive quarter of contraction a day earlier.

The economies of the two North American neighbours have long been entwined: as of late, the two countries have been rocked with decades-high inflation and rising interest rates as central banks push to dampen surging prices.

Both Canada and the U.S. have seen manufacturing output slow, dragging down real gross domestic product this past spring, and housing markets on both sides of the border have significantly cooled in response to rising rates.

Economists say the main difference lies in the pace of the two economic recoveries from the COVID-19 pandemic. But as recession rumblings get louder south of the border, Canada's economic fate might well be tied to the U.S.

Canada's recovery - and decline - lags U.S.

Consumer spending makes up a significant portion of both the Canadian and the U.S. economies, notes Iwan Carani, chief economist of TD Bank.

But the consumer side is an even larger chunk of the U.S. economy, she tells Global News, which makes slowdowns in demand even more apparent in their GDP results.

The U.S. also began its reopening cycle from the COVID-19 pandemic much sooner, as the country had a faster COVID-19 vaccine rollout and loosened restrictions earlier.

Carrie Freestone, economist with Royal Bank of Canada, says the Canadian economic recovery is still progressing this summer as consumer demand for air travel and dining at restaurants, for instance, remains strong.

When this demand eases off, as Freestone expects will happen in due course as rising interest rates bite into household budgets, Canada's consumer spending trends could fall

back in line with its southern neighbour.

"I don't necessarily think it's a divergent path. I think it is just that we have a lot more of this pent-up services sector demand in Canada being unleashed," she tells Global News.

While the U.S. GDP has a heavier weight towards consumer spending, Canada's economy is more exposed to the housing market, Carani notes.

As a result, Canada could feel an outsized impact on its GDP as most economists predict a continued housing correction into the fall.

Home buyers expected to sacrifice more - July 20, 2022

Some global forces, meanwhile, could buoy the Canadian economy, notes Capital Economics' Stephen Brown.

He notes that while commodities have seen "pretty widespread falls recently," oil prices are still holding up, representing a boon for Canada's energy sector.

"And that is more beneficial for the Canadian economy than the U.S.," he says.

Would Canada follow the U.S. into recession? News of the U.S. recording two quarters in a row of negative growth was met with swift debate over whether the bar has been met for a technical recession, with most American officials downplaying such talk.

The National Bureau of Economic Research defines a recession as "a significant decline in economic activity that is spread across the economy and lasts more than a few months."

Biden: U.S. 'not in a recession' according to Federal Reserve chairman, economists

If the U.S. ultimately does fall into a recession, Carani says it will be hard for Canada to achieve its own "soft landing" because the same forces will be acting on the closely-tied economies.

Both countries are facing rampant inflation caused largely by global forces such as supply chain delays and the war in Ukraine, and are meeting these challenges with aggressive interest rate hikes.

Public Health Ontario reports 367 confirmed cases of monkeypox

Public Health Ontario says there were 367 confirmed cases of monkeypox in the province as of Thursday, up from 326 on Monday.

The agency's latest report says most of the cases - nearly 78 per cent - were reported in Toronto.

Almost all of the people affected are male, with only two reported in females.

Public Health Ontario says the average age of confirmed cases is just under 36 years old.

The report says 11 people have been hospitalized with the illness and two are in intensive care.

It says there are also 12 probable cases, 10 of which are in men.

Public health says most cases are among men who report intimate contact with men but say anyone can get monkeypox.

Dr. Kieran Moore, the province's chief medical officer of health, recently said monkeypox will likely be around for "many months" because of its lengthy incubation period but he noted that Ontario isn't seeing rapid growth of the virus.

The virus generally doesn't spread easily and is transmitted through prolonged close contact via respiratory droplets, direct contact with skin lesions or bodily fluids, or through contaminated clothes or bedding.

Common symptoms include rash, oral and genital lesions and swollen lymph nodes.

The monkeypox disease comes from the same family of viruses that cause smallpox, which the World Health Organization declared eradicated around the globe in 1980. Smallpox vaccines have proven effective in combating the monkeypox virus.

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