

Omicron variant fuels unprecedented surge in Canada's COVID-19 cases

Roger Jordan
28 December 2021

Due to the combined impact of the highly contagious Omicron variant and the dismantling of most public health measures, Canada is now experiencing far and away its biggest-ever wave of COVID-19 infections.

Yesterday Ontario and Quebec recorded over 21,650 new infections, with Quebec reporting 12,833 additional cases and Ontario 8,825. Nationally, active COVID-19 cases stand at 175,000 or more, up by approximately 75 percent from the 103,000 reported by the federal government less than a week ago, on December 23.

As grave as the official figures of new COVID cases are, they no longer provide anywhere near an accurate indication of the extent of the virus' spread. As a result of the federal and provincial governments' decision to let the virus run rampant, testing capacity across the country has become overwhelmed. Both provincial and local health authorities are now urging people not to get an official PCR-test unless they are showing symptoms or, in some cases, serious symptoms.

One Toronto-area emergency room doctor, commenting on the fact that Ontario's official daily number of new infections has hovered around 10,000 in recent days, told CTV News, "It's been stuck for a while at 10,000 because that's probably the max that our system can handle in positive results. It's probably closer to 100,000 if I had to guess."

This assessment is backed up by skyrocketing test positivity rates. Quebec reported Tuesday that over 26 percent of all tests performed in the province in the previous 24 hours came back positive, more than five times the 5 percent threshold beyond which the pandemic is considered to be out of control. Other provinces, including Ontario and Manitoba, have test backlogs running into the tens of thousands.

Hospitalizations, which generally lag infection rates by at least two weeks, are also starting to rise. Close to 500 people are currently receiving hospital treatment for

COVID-19 in Ontario, with 187 of those in intensive care. On Tuesday Quebec recorded 88 hospitalizations over the previous 24 hours, including an increase of intensive care patients by six, to 115.

Under conditions of this mounting health disaster, the principal concern of governments and their public health officials is how to scrap the few remaining remnants of public health protections in order to safeguard corporate profits. They are following the lead of the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which took the scandalous decision Monday to cut the isolation period for those infected with COVID-19 in half, from 10 days to just five. The CDC added that those who have received a booster vaccine will not need to isolate at all, even though preliminary evidence indicates that a booster dose only provides 75 percent protection against an Omicron infection and that this protection wanes after just 10 weeks. The CDC's open flouting of science-based recommendations was underscored by the fact that its announcement came as a direct response to an appeal from airline executives to loosen quarantine rules so their operations could continue unhindered.

Quebec's Health Minister Christian Dubé announced Tuesday that health care workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 will be forced to remain on the job if they are not displaying symptoms, based on new government rules for "managing" and "balancing" "risk." Dubé said that, with more than 8,000 health care workers already off the job due to COVID-19 infection or pandemic burnout, the only alternative would have been to stop providing non-emergency care. He added that the provincial Coalition Avenir Quebec government, which like its predecessors is committed to relentless austerity, would soon present similar rules so that other COVID-infected "essential workers" can keep working.

Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health Kieran Moore, notorious for his demand earlier in the fall to "normalize"

COVID-19 infections in schools, has said that in light of Monday's CDC decision, he will be presenting revised isolation rules for the province in the next day or two.

The chorus demanding the virtual scrapping of isolation requirements is growing. Egged on by the corporate media, various doctors and academics are being trotted out to promote what is in effect the homicidal "herd immunity" policy that is responsible for millions of premature deaths around the world. Dr. Sumon Chakrabarti, a Mississauga-based physician, told CTV News, "What this is showing is that we have this mild virus right now, for the most part, especially if you're vaccinated, ripping through the population and that's going to cause a lot of, and I mean this in a good way, immunity...I think that this is actually, believe it or not, good news."

Ottawa-based epidemiologist Dr. Raywat Deonandan agreed, asserting, "We will get to the point where exposures are happening so commonly that we can't keep people at home if they're asymptomatic. I'm not saying blow the doors wide open. I'm not saying throw caution to the wind. I'm not saying keep everything open. I'm saying reassess isolation protocols to keep society running."

The demand to "keep society running" is in reality a plea to keep profits flowing to Bay Street and corporate Canada, irrespective of the loss in human life and number of people crippled by the debilitating impact of Long COVID. It amounts to "blowing the doors wide open" to infection and sabotaging any coordinated public health measures to contain the pandemic.

This savage class war agenda of mass infection and death is being spearheaded by the Trudeau Liberal government, which has slashed the already meagre pandemic financial supports available to workers over recent months in order to force them back on the job. The Trudeau government has not enforced a single new public health policy to combat the rapid spread of Omicron, other than a few worthless travel restrictions adopted after the variant had already taken hold at the community level in Ontario, Quebec and other parts of the country. Its priorities throughout the pandemic have been safeguarding the wealth of the super-rich and the profits of big business.

Even though the Trudeau government's top public health official, Dr. Theresa Tam, declared last week that hospitals would collapse in a matter of weeks if contacts are not substantially reduced, governments at all levels are doubling down on their strategy of mass infection.

For the ruling class, a critical element in keeping "society running" is ensuring schools remain open, which allows parents to be freed from childcare responsibilities so that they remain available for the "labour market," i.e., pumping out profits for the capitalists. Quebec intends to reopen elementary schools as planned next week, with high schools returning just one week later, on January 10. Ontario is expected to finalize its decision on school reopenings later this week. Currently, schools are scheduled to open for full in-class instruction on Monday, January 3.

Opposition to school reopenings is growing under conditions in which the central role they play in driving community transmission of COVID-19 is widely understood. "As a high school student in the YRDBS (York Region District School Board), fully vaccinated, I'm terrified to go back on January 3," a student wrote on Twitter. "For the first time, I actually want to learn online if that's what will keep me safe."

Responding to a group of doctors demanding that schools remain open, a teacher tweeted, "I have 25 kids in my class and see 40 different unmasked kids daily when I have lunch duty in two different classes." A Twitter poll conducted by the biostatistician Ryan Ingrund, who has built up a large following due to his provision of data on COVID-19 outbreaks in schools, found that only 21 percent of respondents favour reopening schools in Ontario.

The critical task now is to arm this widespread anger and outrage over the ruling elite's pandemic policy of mass infection and death with a clear political program aimed at eliminating COVID-19 on a global scale. What is required is a mass movement led by working people to fight for a comprehensive Zero COVID strategy, including mass testing, contact tracing, the isolation of all infected cases, mass vaccination, and the shutdown of all nonessential production and schools, with full compensation for all workers affected, to stop all community transmission.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact