

Canada records highest daily COVID-19 death toll since start of pandemic

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Confirming the most dire warnings made by scientists at the onset of the Omicron-fueled fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitalizations and deaths have reached record highs across Canada. This is a product of the profits-before-lives herd immunity strategy pursued by governments at the federal and provincial levels, regardless of whether they are led by parties of the nominal “left” or right.

A grim milestone was reached on January 27 as 309 COVID-19 deaths were recorded nationally, the highest-ever daily total since the start of the pandemic. The seven-day rolling average of daily deaths sits at 156 as of January 30, nearing the highs of the first two waves of the pandemic, before vaccines were widely available. Hospitalizations are also at record highs, with over 10,000 people in hospital for COVID-19 every day since January 21, according to COVID19Tracker.ca.

An urgent warning must be issued to the Canadian working class: without the independent mass intervention of the working class to put an end to these herd immunity policies and enforce the implementation of the science-backed Zero COVID strategy, thousands of additional lives will be needlessly lost in the weeks and months to come.

Governments, acting at the behest of the major banks and corporations, are rapidly dismantling all remaining public health measures designed to limit the spread of the virus. They are also concealing the extent of transmission and spreading lies about the severity of disease caused by the Omicron variant, regarded as the fastest-spreading SARS-COV-2 variant to date.

These herd immunity policies, lifted from the pages of the far-right Great Barrington Declaration, are designed to maintain the flow of profits to the banks and corporations, and swell the wealth of the super-rich. Schools and non-essential workplaces have been forced open to guarantee a workforce for these corporations, even if legions of workers and their family members are killed or face long-term health problems due to COVID-19 in the process.

Even the unprecedented levels of mass death reported over the past week are likely underestimated, according to infectious disease experts. Due to the decision by provincial governments across the country to dismantle testing capacity for all but the

most high-risk individuals, many are dying of COVID-19 without being added to government figures.

Dr. Tara Moriarty, an infectious disease researcher at the University of Toronto, spelled this out in comments to CBC News.

“If you die with COVID, even if it looks like COVID, smells like COVID, everything ... if they don’t have a positive test, they will not be reported as a COVID death,” Moriarty said. “We know this is a very significant problem.”

Dr. Moriarty stressed the unprecedented character of the current surge, which is taking place even though 80 percent of the Canadian population is double vaccinated.

“We’re seeing scales of infection that we have not seen in the entire epidemic to date,” she commented. “There are going to be a lot of deaths, even if the virus is half as severe [as previous variants].”

With the dismantling of PCR testing for the general public, governments have succeeded in decoupling official infection numbers from hospitalizations and deaths. Millions of workers are flying blind as workplaces and schools across the country experience staggering numbers of absences due to COVID-19 illness, without any notification of who is infected and virtually no contact tracing.

Despite, or rather because of this, governments are quickly moving to remove all remaining public health restrictions that could limit the spread of the virus. They are doing so while insisting that the Omicron variant leads to “mild” disease and that the working class has to “learn to live with the virus”—that is, accept the reality of mass death and the debilitating symptoms of Long COVID.

Schools in most provinces have been open for in-person learning since January 17, helping to fuel the current surge. The vast majority of non-essential production, from factories to warehouses, have remained open throughout the pandemic, ensuring the virus has an ample supply of hosts in which to multiply and spread.

Following a similar announcement by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provincial governments reduced isolation times for infected individuals from ten days to five, going against all scientific advice. This policy’s only function is to get potentially still infectious workers back to

work sooner.

On January 31, non-essential businesses such as restaurants, gyms, sports venues, and gaming establishments were reopened in Ontario with some capacity limits. Progressive Conservative Premier Doug Ford has issued a three-phase plan to fully remove all indoor gathering restrictions by mid-March, potentially including the use of masks.

Repeating the same lie told by countless big business politicians at each stage of the pandemic, Ford claimed, without a shred of evidence, “the worst is behind us.”

In Quebec, restaurants were reopened to indoor dining on January 31 at half capacity. Although bars, casinos, and gyms remain closed, the hard-right Coalition Avenir Quebec government of Premier Francois Legault is expected to quickly move to follow the example of Ontario, throwing caution to the wind and removing all remaining restrictions.

Ford and Legault’s counterparts across the country are carefully following developments in Canada’s two largest provinces to inform their own homicidal reopening plans. At the same time, some of the most reactionary political leaders can barely conceal their excitement at the prospect of doing away once and for all with public health measures that, while offering limited protection to the population, have lowered profits for some sections of big business.

Typical were the remarks of Alberta’s United Conservative Party Premier Jason Kenney, who gushed, “I’m pretty confident it [reopening plan] will come in before the end of March, and I hope it comes... I’ll tell you this: we will eliminate the Restrictions Exemption Program as soon as it is safe to do so.”

In July 2021, in the midst of a short-lived lull in COVID cases, Kenney effectively declared the pandemic over and tore down all COVID-19 public health measures to usher in the “best summer ever.” This led directly to a September surge driven by the Delta variant, which produced Alberta’s highest hospitalization and death rates to that point. Those numbers are now being surpassed in the current wave of the pandemic.

Every section of the capitalist political establishment has adopted the herd immunity policy wholesale. The supposedly “progressive” New Democratic Party government in British Columbia presides over a pandemic policy that is identical in almost all respects to its counterparts across the country. The NDP government has even forced hospital patients infected with COVID-19 to share rooms with uninfected patients, as long as the latter are double vaccinated.

Hospitalizations in BC are now more than double their previous pandemic highs, with a jump in deaths all but guaranteed. Across Canada, health care systems are reaching the breaking point as countless health care workers hang up their scrubs due to unbearable work trauma or are themselves incapacitated by COVID-19.

The federal Liberal government, for its part, has spearheaded the reopening drive throughout the pandemic by insisting that

all measures be taken at the “local” level. This policy has left public health decisions in the hands of hard-right provincial governments that are deliberately infecting the entire population. Meanwhile, the federal Liberal government continues to issue billions in tax breaks and subsidies to major corporations, even as they claw back the extremely limited financial lifelines available to a dwindling number of workers.

Under these conditions, a far-right-led protest involving a few thousand truckers and their fascistic supporters was systematically built up by powerful sections of the media and political establishment over the past week. The purpose they saw in promoting the so-called “Freedom Convoy,” which has called for the overthrow of the federal government so as to scrap all pandemic-related measures, was to use far-right shock troops as a battering ram against the widespread support among working people for stringent public health measures, including lockdowns, to combat COVID-19.

However, opposition is growing within the working class to these policies of death and profits. Mass sickouts of educators, and walkouts of students across Canada and the US in response to exploding cases in schools, are an initial expression of widespread outrage and a desire to protect lives.

If this growing movement is to succeed in ending the pandemic, it must mobilize the whole working class to fight for a Zero COVID strategy both in Canada and internationally. This must be done independently of the trade unions, who support herd immunity and have spent the past two years smothering all worker opposition to the profits-before-life policy of the capitalist ruling class.

We encourage all workers who support such a struggle to make plans to attend the next public meeting of the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, which will take place on Sunday, February 6, at 1 p.m. Eastern Time. To register to attend, email the CERSC at cersc.csppb@gmail.com or visit our Twitter or Facebook account: https://twitter.com/cersc_csppb and <https://www.facebook.com/cersc.csppb>.



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