

Omicron wreaks death in Quebec on a scale not seen since the pandemic's first wave

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As the right-wing Coalition pour l'avenir du Québec (CAQ) provincial government eliminates the last mitigation measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, mortality statistics are revealing the catastrophic consequences of its pursuit of a “profits before life” policy during Canada’s Omicron variant-fueled fifth wave.

According to the latest data from Quebec’s Institute of Statistics, Quebec saw 24 percent more deaths in the third week of January 2022 than prior to the pandemic. This is the highest level of excess mortality since the pandemic’s first wave in spring 2020, when the excess mortality rate peaked at 57 percent. In the first wave, Quebec had one of the highest per capita mortality rates in the world, due in part to the ruinous conditions in seniors’ nursing homes, public and private alike.

In total, Quebec recorded 7,900 deaths in January 2022, a 13 percent increase in mortality from the month of January in the years that preceded the pandemic.

According to Statistics Canada, excess mortality represents “mortality above what would be expected based on the non-emergency mortality rate in the target population” and is “a better indicator” than officially-recorded COVID deaths “for monitoring the magnitude of the pandemic and making comparisons.”

The Omicron wave is proving to be the deadliest in absolute numbers since the second wave (October 2020–January 2021) when vaccines were not yet widely available. According to Quebec’s official tally of COVID-19 deaths, since the beginning of December 2021 the Omicron wave has caused approximately 2,550 deaths, or more than 18 percent of the 14,100 COVID deaths the province has recorded since the beginning of the pandemic two years ago this month. It is the deadliest wave for people under 60 years of age since the first wave, causing at least 116 deaths in this age group.

Discussing the Omicron wave’s impact at the pan-Canadian level, University of Toronto Professor Tara Moriarty recently explained that deaths in the 19 and under age group during the Omicron wave account for more than 42 percent of all COVID deaths in this age group throughout the pandemic. Omicron is also responsible for nearly 45 percent of all intensive care hospitalizations for COVID among those 19 and under, and 57 percent of all hospitalizations.

These figures are a tragic exposure of the lying propaganda promoted by the Justin Trudeau-led federal Liberal government, its provincial counterparts, and the corporate media that the Omicron variant is “mild.” Canada’s political establishment has also claimed that schools are “safe” and the virus’ impact on young people is benign or akin to that of a cold. This propaganda has had only one objective: to silence opposition to the elimination of any public health measures that might impede the accumulation of profit by big business, the banks and the rich.

In Quebec, the CAQ government, led by multi-millionaire and ex-Air Transat CEO François Legault, is rushing to eliminate whatever limited and insufficient anti-COVID mitigation measures remain.

In a matter of weeks in February, the government allowed restaurants to operate at maximum capacity and allowed all businesses to reopen, announced plans to completely phase out vaccine passports by March 14, and removed the mask mandate in elementary and high school classrooms. During this period, hardly a day went by without the government making a new announcement that an anti-COVID public measure was being rolled back or completely scrapped.

On March 2, the CAQ government announced that the requirement to wear masks in public places will be eliminated “by mid-April at the latest.” This announcement was accompanied by the now customary statement that Quebecers must “learn to live with the virus,” which means, as Legault himself admitted, accepting more hospitalizations and deaths.

Quebec’s Public Health Director Dr. Luc Boileau said that wearing a mask would become “a personal choice as part of a progression towards a normal life.” Since most of the population no longer has access to PCR tests to detect the virus and data on the extent of mass infection is otherwise increasingly unreliable and difficult to obtain, the government is leaving this “choice” to be made blindly by each individual.

Premier Legault’s office confirmed that “in the future, vaccines and masks will be the insurance policy to avoid new lockdowns.” Made in conjunction with the government’s announcement of the closure of some vaccination centres and the impending elimination of the mask mandate, this statement confirms that the CAQ is determined to declare the pandemic

over. And this, even as scientists are sounding the alarm about the danger of a new, more deadly wave fuelled by the Omicron BA.2 sub-variant, which recent studies have found to be more contagious, more virulent, and more vaccine resistant than its BA.1 parent.

For the ruling class and its political representatives, the entirely preventable deaths of 2,500 Quebecers in less than 100 days are of no consequence. This is underscored by the recent announcement that the government will not hold a ceremony this year to officially mark the March 11 National Day of Remembrance for the victims of COVID-19.

In January, government officials publicly rejoiced that 2 million Quebecers had been infected during the Omicron wave, falsely claiming that this would confer immunity to the coronavirus. This figure was later revised upwards to about 3 million, provoking further expressions of joy from Quebec's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Boileau, who declared that "everything is going in the right direction."

In the up-side-down world that these ruling class mercenaries inhabit, the shocking revelation that about 40 percent of Quebec children were "exposed" to the virus during the Omicron wave in COVID-infested schools was the occasion for announcing not a tightening of measures to protect children, but the lifting of the mask mandate in classrooms.

By putting profits ahead of lives, the ruling class has not only condemned thousands to die. It is also covering up the other perverse health consequences of the pandemic.

According to a recent study published in the medical journal *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 5.2 million children worldwide have lost a parent or primary caregiver to the pandemic. This figure has doubled in the last six months. In Canada, some 2,000 children have lost a parent.

Legault, Boileau and Health Minister Christian Dubé, who all frequently invoke the "mental health" of children in arguing for schools to be kept open and the mask mandate ended, have nothing to say about the psychological wounds inflicted on children who have lost a parent. Nor will they address the trauma suffered by children who know or fear that they have involuntarily infected a deceased relative. According to Dr. Joanne Liu, a pediatrician at the Sainte-Justine University Hospital in Montreal, the trauma of children who have infected a loved one is very real: "We feel the impact of the psychological distress experienced by children who have unfortunately infected one of their grandparents."

The CAQ government is also blithely ignoring the devastating impact of Long COVID. It is scientifically established that a significant number of people who have contracted COVID-19 suffer from long-term symptoms such as heart problems, brain fog, headaches, muscle pain, shortness of breath and extreme fatigue. Studies suggest that 10 to 20 percent of people stricken with COVID-19, including children, experience such symptoms three months after their infection. For some, symptoms have persisted for a year or more.

Experts say that at least 9,000 Quebecers currently suffer from the disease. The three clinics that specialize in caring for people with Long COVID have waiting lists of hundreds of names. Across Canada, there are an estimated 170,000 people suffering from Long COVID.

By knowingly allowing millions of people to be infected with a disease that is likely to have such a long-term impact, the ruling class is creating a generation of sick and disabled people. With the federal government's elimination of pandemic assistance to workers, those who suffer from Long COVID to the point of being unable to work are threatened with destitution.

This situation is exacerbated by the widespread official denials of the severity or even existence of Long COVID. For the thousands of people who have contracted the virus in the workplace, the process of having their occupational disease recognized and receiving compensation is in most cases a long road that ends in a refusal. Some worker compensation boards, such as WorkSafe NB in New Brunswick, simply do not recognize the existence of Long COVID syndrome, dismissing evidence of its existence as "anecdotal."

In Quebec, the Workplace Health and Safety Commission (CNESST) claims to recognize Long COVID as an occupational disease or syndrome, but many workers have reported that their claims have been rejected. This is either because the CNESST has deemed the medical evidence of post-COVID symptoms as insufficient or because they were unable to demonstrate to the agency's satisfaction that they had contracted COVID at work. Due to the absence of PCR testing, it will henceforth be almost impossible for a worker to prove that they were infected at work and thus satisfy the CNESST bureaucrats.



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