

COVID-19 killed more people in Quebec during the first 6 months of 2022 than all of 2021

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12 July 2022

The number of people killed by COVID-19 in the province of Quebec during the first 6 months of 2022 already exceeds the number of pandemic dead for all of 2021.

According to figures from the National Institute of Public Health compiled by the Montreal daily *La Presse*, 3,471 Quebecers died of COVID-19 between January 1 and June 28, 2022, while the number of deaths for the entire year of 2021 was 3,273.

The increase in deaths is linked to a massive increase in infections since the beginning of the year. In 2021, the province officially recorded 642,930 COVID-19 cases. Since January 2022, 1,088,743 cases have been reported. Even the latter extraordinary number is a vast underestimate. Most testing facilities were shut down last winter, even as a fifth Omicron-driven pandemic wave was ravaging Quebec, and access to the more reliable PCR tests was severely curtailed.

The COVID-19 death curve is rising dangerously throughout Canada. In a July 4 tweet, Dr. Amit Arya, a palliative care physician in Toronto, explained that in the first 181 days of this year Canada's COVID death toll reached 82.5 percent of the number of COVID fatalities in all of 2021. At 62.6, the average number of daily deaths is higher than during the pandemic's first 300 days in 2020 and all 2021.

Last week, health officials in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia acknowledged that their provinces are facing a new wave of COVID-19 infections. Ontario, the country's most populous province, announced last Thursday increases in the 7-day daily averages of cases, hospitalizations and deaths. The COVID test positivity rate is at its highest since early May, at 13.5 percent. The World Health Organization considers that the

pandemic is out of control when the positivity rate is above 5 percent.

For several weeks now, it has been clear that Quebec is in the grip of a new Omicron-variant driven wave, the seventh since the beginning of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. Last Thursday, as 20 fatalities were added to the province's grim tally of 15,646 COVID deaths, a 67 percent increase in deaths was reported in the preceding 7 days. Hospitalizations and the number of people in intensive care are also up, by 18 percent and 8 percent respectively.

The public health care system—in a permanent state of disrepair due to the savage austerity measures imposed for decades by federal and provincial governments—is once again on the verge of collapse. As of July 7, 7,318 health care workers in Quebec were absent due to COVID-19, an increase of more than 1,000 over the previous week and nearly 3,000 since the beginning of June.

These absences directly related to COVID-19 are in addition to the chronic staff shortages caused by the deplorable working conditions that have been imposed by the right-wing Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government, led by the multi-millionaire former airline CEO François Legault, with the full complicity of the trade unions.

On July 7, at a press conference during which he paid lip service to the growing evidence that the pandemic “is taking the form of a [new] wave,” Quebec's Director of Public Health, Dr. Luc Boileau, stated that “all in all, we did not see it coming, this increase.”

What nonsense! The seventh wave, like the staggering number of deaths since the beginning of 2022, is the foreseeable and expected result of the

criminal policy of “herd immunity”—letting a deadly virus rip through the population so as not to disrupt the flow of profit—that has been enforced by all provincial governments and the federal Liberal government of Justin Trudeau.

At the end of 2021, governments in Canada, as elsewhere, aggressively lifted virtually all COVID-related public health restrictions on the spurious grounds that the Omicron variant was so contagious that its spread could not be stopped and that it was “mild.” The higher death toll caused by the Omicron wave and the well-documented ability of its subvariants to reinfect its victims have shown all this to have been a pack of lies.

The dismantling of the remaining public health measures was completed under pressure from the “Freedom Convoy,” a far-right movement encouraged by the federal Conservative Party and much of the corporate media that occupied Ottawa for more than three weeks in late January and February 2022 to demand an end to all anti-COVID restrictions. The response of governments across Canada was to proclaim the end of the pandemic and tell Canadians to learn to “live with the virus.”

In Quebec, the campaign to scrap the remaining COVID-19 mitigation measures was particularly frenetic. In late February and March there was a cascade of almost daily announcements from the Legault government setting a date, then advancing it, for the lifting of virtually every single anti-COVID public health measure, from capacity limits to mask mandates.

As of May 14, face masks are no longer required in public places. Under the fraudulent pretext that the pandemic is essentially behind us, the CAQ government has encouraged people to crowd into restaurants, bars, theaters, cinemas and sporting events without any protective measures. Schools remained open until the end of the school year at the end of June regardless of the number of infections, only to be replaced by summer and day camps. Many of these have already had to suspend activities due to outbreaks among children who were herded together without any protections.

The current rise in cases is fueled by increasingly contagious and immuno-evasive variants, such as Omicron BA.4 and Omicron BA.5, which represent

more than 30 percent of cases in Quebec, a proportion that is constantly increasing. Their appearance had been predicted by several experts who warned public health officials that by letting the coronavirus circulate freely among the population, they had allowed it to evolve and become more contagious, more resistant to vaccines and to the antibodies created by the previous infections.

Nothing about the current situation is a surprise for the ruling class. It is the deliberate result of its homicidal “back to normal” campaign, i.e., forcing children back to schools (or summer camps) and parents to their workplaces, exposing them to a potentially lethal and debilitating disease so that big business, wealthy shareholders and banks can continue to pile up the profits extracted from the labor of working people.

At the July 7 press conference, the CAQ government publicly reassured the ruling class that it is not going to do anything that will disturb the flow of profits. Health Minister Christian Dubé, an accountant and businessman, said the government “has no intention of imposing new measures” under the pretext that the situation is “under control.”

This lie is so blatant that even the right-wing *Montreal Gazette* felt compelled to respond. In an editorial titled “Quebec’s COVID plan is everyone for themselves, it seems” the *Gazette* highlighted Dubé’s “under control claim,” asking pointedly, “Is it really? And if so, for how long?” The editorial went on to provide a long list of indicators that prove the pandemic is once again surging, writing in summary that “cases, hospitalizations and deaths are on the rise.”



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