

2022 was Canada's deadliest year of the COVID-19 pandemic

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According to official statistics released by Health Canada, 2022 proved to be the deadliest year of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada so far. Almost 20,000 Canadians died from COVID-19, representing close to a 30 percent increase in fatalities compared to 2021.

As stark as they are, these official figures represent a significant undercount of the true toll the virus has taken across the country. Data compiled by Dr. Tara Moriarty, an infectious disease expert at the University of Toronto, show that the country has recorded almost 65,000 excess deaths since the start of the pandemic. The excess death rate was almost 1.5 times higher in 2022 compared to 2020 and 2021.

Unsurprisingly, total infections and hospitalizations were also at their highest levels during 2022. Unlike the previous two years, there was no significant drop in hospital admissions at any point during the year, with thousands hospitalized continuously. The height of the original Omicron wave in the winter of 2021-22 saw over 10,000 Canadians in hospital care at the end of January 2022. At no point since has that number dipped lower than 3,000. The last reported national data shows that hospitalizations are currently around 5,000, a number that most public health experts expect to rise drastically in the coming months with the emergence of new variants.

Meanwhile, despite the vast curtailing of PCR testing by public health agencies across the country, over half of the country's official 4.5 million infections occurred in 2022 alone.

Taken together, these figures represent a damning indictment of the claim advanced by the political and media establishment that the Omicron variant was mild. This grotesque lie was used by the Liberal Trudeau government and all provincial governments to justify the dropping of all measures aimed at mitigating

the spread of COVID-19. The scrapping of the last remaining public health measures in the spring of 2022 was in fact a direct response to the demands of the far-right "Freedom Convoy," a movement comprised of fascistic social elements.

Incited and built up by significant sections of the capitalist ruling class, including the official opposition Conservative Party and fascistic figures in the US such as Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former President Donald Trump, the movement was invoked as an excuse by the Trudeau government and provincial health agencies to legitimize their refusal to implement mitigation measures to curb the disease and death that Omicron caused during 2022.

Officials often assert that there is a "lack of public appetite for public health measures," but this is a filthy lie. Polling has, since the start of the pandemic, shown that the public has consistently supported stronger health measures than those governments were willing to implement. A poll conducted in November by CTV News revealed that almost 70 percent of Canadians supported a return of face mask mandates, with 52 percent saying they supported such a measure fully and 17 percent saying they "somewhat support" a return to face masking. Just 22 percent of respondents said they opposed such a measure.

As the virus spread unchecked throughout the year, pressure continued to be applied to the country's overstretched and under-funded health care system. Hospitals across Canada buckled under the massive amounts of disease circulating in communities across the country, a trend that only accelerated as the winter respiratory virus season commenced.

Vancouver General Hospital, the largest in the province of British Columbia, reports that patients are waiting over 7 hours to receive care in the ER.

Statistics provided by the Quebec Ministry of Health showed that most major hospital ER rooms in the province are currently operating at over 100 percent capacity. The chief of Montreal General Hospitals, Dr. Cristian Toarta, told the *Montreal Gazette* that the month of December was the worst he has ever seen. In Edmonton, the provincial capital of Alberta, hospitals have reported the longest wait times for emergency care since they began collecting data in 2015.

The situation appears to be even more dire in rural communities, where emergency care is collapsing altogether. According to data collected by CBC News, emergency rooms were closed for the equivalent of 4 months throughout small communities in British Columbia in 2022, or 2,900 hours. The community of Clearwater, BC saw its hospital ER close on 62 different occasions. In Ontario, Clinton Public Hospital announced on December 29 that it was closing its ER room for at least 12 hours.

The decision by the Trudeau government and provincial health authorities to let the virus rip unimpeded, a policy adopted by all capitalist governments around the world, has enabled COVID-19 to mutate into ever more dangerous variants. The latest example is the XBB.1.5 variant, which is now spreading rapidly in the northeastern part of the United States. Due to extremely limited genomic sequencing by provincial health authorities, it is impossible to say how rapidly the variant is spreading in Canada, but experience with previous dominant variants such as the original Wuhan strain, Alpha and Omicron would suggest that by now most of the country has already been seeded.

As of Wednesday, the Public Health Agency of Canada reported 21 cases in which the new variant had been sequenced. The variant has been sequenced in small numbers in Ontario and Quebec. On January 3, British Columbia Chief Public Health Officer Bonnie Henry revealed during an interview with CBC radio that the province had identified five such cases. Given Henry's track record of previously lying to the public to conceal the spread and danger of COVID-19, including in February 2021 when it was revealed by CTV news that she deliberately misinformed the public of how rapidly the then-new Alpha and Beta variants were spreading by a factor of 10, her latest figures are almost certainly a massive undercount.

Montreal-based microbiologist Dr. Donald Vinh sharply criticized the absence of widespread PCR testing across Canada in response to the emergence of the new variant. Ever since the eruption of Omicron last winter, health care authorities have made it all but impossible for the vast majority of infected people to get tested, unless they access care in an emergency room. "To think that we are living in Canada... and yet if you're sick, you cannot get tested for COVID easily — I think that is just the antithesis of medicine," he told Global News. "Every wave that we've had has led to an increase in hospitalizations. And even though we can buffer that increase, that's come at a price to our health care system. And so... going forward, we should be very aggressive against XBB.1.5. or whatever other variant is emerging."

Under these conditions, the rank hypocrisy of the Trudeau government's announcement that travellers from China will be screened for COVID-19 upon arrival as of January 5 is hard to beat. The decision by the Chinese government to abandon its Zero COVID policy in November, which has led predictably to a massive outbreak in the country, is one which the Canadian government, in partnership with its US imperialist ally, has long demanded.

While it allows XBB.1.5 to spread unchecked at home, the Trudeau government and the public health establishment would have the population believe that they are deeply concerned about protecting their health by banning travelers from China who test positive for the virus. As principled medical and public health experts have noted, this policy has nothing to do with protecting the Canadian public. It is a policy that is explicitly political in nature, serving only to poison public opinion towards China and thereby whip up public support for Washington and Ottawa's aggressive preparations to wage war against China.



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