

COVID-19 infections rise sharply across Canada as hospitalizations reach highest level since last winter

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Following the beginning of the school year and the return of children to cramped classrooms, COVID-19 infections are rising sharply once again across Canada. Tens of thousands are being infected and more than a hundred people are dying every week.

According to the COVID-19 Resource Center, roughly 1 in 25 people across the country are currently infected, a number roughly 14 times higher than the lowest point in the pandemic to date. In this context, most provinces and territories have been labelled “severe risk” or “extremely high risk” for COVID-19 infection.

Federal data is also showing a marked rise in infections, with 10,000 confirmed new cases and 129 deaths registered during the first week in October. As of October 10, COVID-19 patients occupied 3,797 hospital beds across the country—the highest occupancy rate since last winter.

Official figures provided by the Canadian government are a gross undercount of actual infections. According to figures from Worldometer, 778,300 Canadians are currently infected with COVID-19.

COVID PCR testing in the general public has largely stopped. Wastewater monitoring, functioning in a severely reduced capacity, currently covers less than 30 percent of the Canadian population. The other metric available—testing of symptomatic patients in hospitals—is a lagging indicator of new infections as patients being tested have been infected for days or weeks even before presenting serious symptoms. The reduction of testing is part of a systematic cover-up of the pandemic in order to sell the lie that the pandemic “is over.”

Roughly half of new infections are located in the

province of Quebec, where more than 100 long-term care homes, transformed into scenes of mass death during the first and second waves of the pandemic, are currently grappling with new COVID-19 outbreaks.

In Canada’s most populous province of Ontario, wastewater testing has shown that COVID-19 activity has risen sharply since early August and is now at levels not seen since March. Anger among healthcare workers, who were overwhelmed by seasonal respiratory illness last fall, has compelled the provincial authorities to reinstate a mask mandate at several provincial hospitals.

The hard-right Tory government led by Doug Ford, which long ago enforced the dismantling of all remaining COVID-19 protections, made explicit that this would be only a “temporary measure.” Despite the sharp rise in respiratory infections among school children, his government refuses to require masks in school.

In Alberta, COVID-19 outbreaks in acute care settings have exhibited exponential growth in the past few weeks. In mid-September, there were 129 patients in units listed in an outbreak. As of October 10, that number more than doubled to 296. COVID-denying far-right premier Danielle Smith has begrudgingly brought back “enhanced masking” only in healthcare settings with the caveat that regions and hospitals can opt out if they choose, effectively nullifying the mandate.

In early October, infections in British Columbia reached their highest point in more than a year. New infections have multiplied sixfold since August, having increased notably among people 60 and older. In the epidemiological week ending October 7, hospitalizations were up 58 percent with over 800 new

infections reported. It was only after an open letter penned by Protect Our Province BC, a group of physicians, nurses and health scientists calling for universal masking, that the provincial New Democratic Party brought back masking in healthcare settings.

In the province's Northern Health region, a COVID-19 outbreak quickly overwhelmed nursing staff at Prince George's chronically underfunded University Hospital of Northern BC, compelling the province to begin transferring severely ill COVID-19 patients to hospitals further south.

The fall surge is the direct result of the criminal policies of capitalist governments everywhere who long ago adopted the homicidal "forever COVID" strategy which prioritizes profits over lives. The dismantling of virtually all public health measures that limit the spread of COVID-19 all but guarantees preventable mass infection, death and debilitation for months and years to come.

According to the COVID-19 Tracker, 126 Canadians died from COVID-19 this past week, underscoring the bankruptcy of a vaccine-only strategy to protect the population. The updated mRNA vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and the protein-based vaccine Novavax approved by the Canadian government, correspond to the variant XBB.1.5, which dominated throughout the spring and summer. However, XBB.1.5 has quickly been superseded by EG.5 (Eris), now the dominant strain around the world, threatening greater transmissibility and vaccine resistance.

Additionally, years of official pandemic health policy increasingly dominated by pseudo-science and reactionary far-right politics have fuelled the growth of vaccine hesitancy. A new survey indicates that almost half of residents in the prairie province of Saskatchewan likely will not be getting a vaccine or vaccine update this fall because of "vaccine fatigue." In British Columbia, delays in the new vaccine rollout, which is only taking place amid the fall surge, further eroded confidence in the program's critical role in saving lives. To this point, only 33 percent of British Columbians have received a fourth dose.

Fuelling the skepticism is a host of false information circulating in far-right "news" rags, including the *Epoch Times*, which ran a patently absurd headline on September 28 falsely linking COVID-19 vaccines to 17 million excess deaths globally. In fact, excess deaths

have come from the capitalist governments' criminal mishandling of the pandemic and the decades-long assault on the healthcare system. In Canada, it was the federal Liberal Trudeau government, which is backed by the trade unions and New Democratic Party, that spearheaded the scrapping of all remaining COVID-19 public health measures in response to the far-right "Freedom" Convoy's occupation of downtown Ottawa in early 2022.

The homicidal policies of "forever COVID" pursued by the Canadian ruling class and its political counterparts internationally give renewed urgency for an international science-based strategy for elimination led by the working class that the *World Socialist Web Site*, in collaboration with principled scientists, has been calling for since the beginning of the pandemic.



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