

Measles outbreak in Ontario underscores spread of infectious diseases across Canada

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Canada is just emerging from another winter wave of multiple infectious diseases only for the population to be confronted with a growing measles outbreak, as the ruling class' deliberate undermining of public health since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic takes its toll. The combined effects of RSV, influenza, COVID-19, and Norovirus produced another devastating "quademic" that the already depleted healthcare system has struggled to handle.

The flu season, which normally begins in November or December, hit later than usual this winter during the first weeks of the year. More than 20,000 cases of flu-related hospitalizations have been reported nationwide, along with 295 deaths. Doctors attributed the high rates of severe illness and hospitalization to waning immunity from vaccinations administered in the fall, while also noting the absence of public health measures such as masking that helped nearly eliminate the disease during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

RSV, which causes cold-like symptoms, saw more than 5,500 hospitalizations across Canada this season, with 207 requiring admission to intensive care units. A total of 74 deaths were attributed to the disease. Like influenza, RSV test-positivity rates outstripped recent years.

Norovirus, which causes gastroenteritis, experienced spikes throughout the country, with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) announcing numbers higher than the previous 5-year average, although the disease is likely severely underreported.

While the burden of COVID-19 was less than prior years, a "good" wave still produced nearly 30,000 hospitalizations and 1,837 deaths since the end of last summer. The dismantling of surveillance has shrouded the extent of the disease's spread, although estimates put the number of Canadians now suffering from Long Covid at approximately 3.5 million.

According to the COVID-19 tracker maintained by the University of Toronto's Dr. Tara Moriarty, one in 151 Canadians is currently infected with the virus. The latest data dated April 12 stated that infections this week will result in 4,400 hospitalizations and 8,600 Long Covid cases serious enough to limit daily life activities.

While the winter quademic is beginning to subside, an ongoing outbreak of measles has spread across the country,

particularly in southern Ontario. The disease was declared eliminated in the country in 1998, and while sporadic outbreaks have occurred since, prior to this year annual cases have averaged below 100 across Canada.

In the first 3 months of 2025, however, 731 cases have been reported, 656 of which were in Ontario. Fifty-two cases have required hospitalization. The vast majority of cases have occurred among the unvaccinated, although experts warn that adults over the age of 30 have likely only received one dose of the vaccine and may be susceptible to symptomatic infection.

The virus' high transmissibility makes contact tracing difficult and has allowed it to penetrate to even remote regions, such as an indigenous community in northern Alberta that has been hit by the outbreak.

There is nothing inevitable about the widespread presence of infectious diseases across the country that basic public health measures, well-funded vaccination programs combined with education campaigns, and scientific policies could suppress. The reason for the past winter's "quademic" and the resurgence of measles is the criminal disregard for public health shown by the entire political establishment, especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic just over five years ago.

The federal Liberal government, led by Justin Trudeau from 2015 until this March, focused its pandemic response on bailing out the financial oligarchy to the tune of \$650 billion. While it was forced to sanction initial temporary lockdowns due to the development of wildcat strikes among sections of the working class demanding that action be taken to suppress the potentially deadly disease, the government quickly pivoted with the support of its trade union allies to the organization of a disastrous back-to-work campaign, which claimed the lives of thousands of people across Canada and resulted in tens of thousands more cases of Long Covid.

The federal government worked hand-in-glove with the most right-wing provincial governments to impose its "profits-before-lives" agenda, including Tory Premier Doug Ford in Ontario and the "Quebec first" Francois Legault in Quebec. The lies used to justify this campaign, including "learning to live with the virus" and the claim about a "live virus vaccine," i.e., mass infection, providing immunity, gave succor to the most reactionary, anti-science conceptions that are now playing a

role in the rampant spread of infectious diseases of all kinds.

Ontario's hard-right Progressive Conservative provincial government has tried to downplay the latest measles outbreak, pointing to its clustering among the Anabaptist community in southern-Ontario. And the chief medical officer has limited his public appearances as much as possible.

The outbreak has already spread outside this region however, with Toronto Public Health warning that a case has been identified in the city and passengers on certain commuter trains may have been exposed to the virus. In Montreal, a Canadiens NHL hockey game may have seen spectators exposed to the virus.

Furthermore, there remains the risk of new cases being introduced from travel to the United States, where measles continues to multiply under the callous disregard of the newly minted Health Secretary and anti-vaxxer Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The incredible transmissibility of measles requires that upwards of 95 percent of the population be immune to restrict its spread. Vaccine coverage has declined significantly since 2019 however, with the proportion of the MMR vaccine uptake declining to 82.5 percent nationwide. Recognizing the growing danger posed by measles, public health officials and scientists have called for measles to be added to wastewater tracking dashboards.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has announced that it secured half a million doses of GlaxoSmithKline's bird flu vaccine. The abysmal response to the spread of bird flu among cattle in the United States, driven by the same murderous "profits before life" mantra that guided the ruling elite's response to COVID-19, has increased the risk of this virulent disease spreading to humans, where to date it has exhibited a fatality rate of up to 50 percent. An MRNA vaccine for Norovirus is also currently undergoing trials.

As all non-pharmaceutical public health measures instituted during the pandemic have been systematically stripped away, there is increasing reliance on vaccination as the only mechanism for controlling disease transmission. However, the anti-scientific forces cultivated by far-right sections of the ruling class are undermining public receptivity to vaccine drives.

A survey by Health Canada found that nearly 20 percent of those who did not receive a COVID booster the previous winter took their decision based on unfounded concerns over its safety profile. The same survey found that less than 30 percent of adults were willing to receive the RSV vaccine currently under development and 34 percent doubted the efficacy of the flu vaccine. Pointing to the impact that the murderous policies of mass infection enforced by the ruling elites in all major countries during the pandemic to protect corporate profits have had on wider layers of the population, the survey found that 40 percent of adults surveyed felt that a bout of flu was preferable to a vaccine in conferring protection against infection.

With the connivence of the media, all capitalist parties have

ensured that issues of public health remain off the agenda during the current federal election campaign. New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh has sought in a thoroughly dishonest manner to score political points as the defender of Canada's healthcare system against the vicious attacks carried out by the Liberal government and threats to its existence posed by the Conservative opposition. During Wednesday's French-language leaders' debate, Singh made a point of challenging the moderator after he was questioned about his repeated references to healthcare during the two-hour exchange.

All of this is hot air. The NDP propped up the Liberal government for more than five years, during a period in which the Liberals ensured that the transfers from the federal government to the provinces for healthcare spending fell in real terms. Moreover, in March 2022, Singh concluded a deal with Trudeau at the very point where Trudeau's Liberals were implementing the demands of the far-right "Freedom" Convoy by dismantling all remaining COVID public health measures. At the time, Singh frankly said that he wanted to reach the deal to guarantee "political stability" for Trudeau's government as it waged war against Russia in Ukraine, carried out a huge rearmament program and enforced "post-pandemic" austerity.

As for the NDP's union sponsors, they systematically sabotaged all efforts by workers during the worst phases of the COVID-19 pandemic to safeguard their health and working conditions. Whether it was teacher unions in the public sector, Unifor at the Detroit Three's operations in southern Ontario, or the USW and UFCW in manufacturing, mining, or the service sector, all of the bureaucracies worked to confine worker opposition to the ruling elite's murderous policy within the pro-employer "collective bargaining" system. They repeatedly responded to rank-and-file action by calling off job actions and urging workers to file grievances that predictably came to nothing.

In Ontario and Quebec, where significant opposition has developed in the working class to health care privatization and attacks on health workers' conditions, the health sector unions have connived with the respective provincial governments to prevent the development of a political struggle in defence of public healthcare by the working class.



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