

Canada continues to face measles outbreak as result of capitalist assault on public health

Omar Ali
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Canada remains in the midst of a major measles outbreak, a devastating public health catastrophe that is the entirely predictable outcome of decades of deliberate policies to subordinate human lives to corporate profit. The outbreak, which began in New Brunswick last autumn, has spread across the country and threatens to strip Canada of its “eliminated” status for measles, which has been maintained for over a quarter century.

By the first week of September, federal data confirmed 4,902 measles cases in 2025—a staggering toll that surpasses by multiples the yearly averages in other advanced economies. Ontario has reported more than 2,379 cases, Alberta over 1,850, and British Columbia close to 300. Other provinces, including Manitoba, continue to post exposure alerts.

The death of a newborn infant in Ontario earlier this year, infected congenitally, tragically underscores the human cost of this entirely preventable crisis. Officials were eager to highlight the infant’s comorbidities to avoid placing blame on public health failings.

Canada stands out among developed nations even under conditions of a global resurgence of the disease, which according to the United Nations has seen cases internationally reach 350,000 in 2024. Despite an ongoing outbreak in Texas, infection figures in the United States are one-third that of Canada, a country with a population around one-tenth that of its southern neighbour. It is also far greater than the 13-year high reported in England last year. Despite the upsurge of cases and the concern over transmission in schools, the United Conservative Party Alberta provincial government, led by far-right Premier Danielle Smith, has refused to introduce mandatory vaccinations for students. Dr. Mark Joffe, the province’s former chief medical officer, has denounced the official response as

“a complete failure of leadership at all levels.”

Officials in British Columbia are warning that the return to school threatens to rekindle the outbreak there, which began in classrooms before the summer holiday. The region most affected in that province has vaccine coverage of less than 70 percent. When asked if proof of vaccination would be required for school attendance, the New Democratic Party’s provincial health minister Josie Osborne also refused, saying, ‘We want children to be able to attend school safely and happily, and receive the education that they need and deserve.’

The overwhelming majority of those infected are unvaccinated or have unknown vaccination status. In Ontario, nearly 90 percent of cases were in unimmunized individuals. Children and adolescents make up the largest share. This reflects not some mysterious turn of fate, but the collapse of routine immunization and the shredding of the health infrastructure required to sustain it. National monitoring shows measles vaccination coverage has plummeted since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with two-dose coverage for seven-year-olds in Ontario hovering at just 70 percent—far below the 95 percent needed to stop measles from spreading.

While there are multiple factors responsible for the outbreak, including a lack of access to family physicians and the disruption of routine immunization during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary culprit is clear: a decline in vaccine uptake due to vaccine hesitancy spurred by misinformation.

The routine vaccination of the latter-20th century that resulted in elimination has given way to increasing vaccine hesitancy and a resurgence in the disease in the past 15 years, despite the proven safety and efficacy of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Prior to the development of a measles vaccine in 1963, tens

of thousands of Canadians were infected each year.

The regions that are being hit hardest have some of the lowest rates of vaccination and have seen precipitous declines since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In southern Alberta, the number of doses of the MMR vaccine administered has dropped by half since 2019.

The decline in MMR vaccine rates goes hand in hand with a systematic rollback of COVID-19 vaccine provision. Even as the virus continues to spread globally, the federal government ended all funding for COVID-19 vaccines this year, leaving it up to the provinces to pay for them. In Quebec, COVID-19 vaccines will from this fall be restricted to “at-risk” population groups, including the over 65s and residents of long-term care homes. Everyone else will have to pay between \$150 and \$180 at a pharmacy. Alberta has also ended free COVID-19 vaccinations.

The ruling elite bears full responsibility for creating the political and social conditions that have fuelled the resurgence of this most contagious of diseases. The so-called “Freedom Convoy” of early 2022, portrayed at the time by the mainstream press as a spontaneous eruption of popular opposition to COVID-related public health measures, was in fact systematically promoted by powerful sections of the ruling class and their media mouthpieces. Big business, backed by the corporate media, sought to force through the full reopening of the economy in the name of profits, regardless of the death toll. The far right was deliberately mobilized to menace Parliament and blockade border crossings with the US as a battering ram against even the most limited mitigation measures.

The lifting of all anti-COVID measures was then endorsed by all the official parties, from the Liberals and Conservatives to the NDP and the Bloc Québécois. The unions played a critical role in legitimizing the far right’s anti-science tirades. Working systematically to block any independent movement in the working class to demand serious public health measures and a massive expansion of health care, the unions enforced the ruling class line of “living with the virus,” which meant mass infection, death, and the spread of Long Covid.

The political establishment and media deliberately spread misinformation to sow confusion and demoralization, and justify sending workers back into

factories and workplaces, and children back to school, where the coronavirus quickly spread.

The resurgence of measles is inseparable from a long-standing onslaught by the ruling class on public health and healthcare. Over decades, successive federal and provincial governments—Liberal and Conservative alike—have carried out a relentless program of budget cutting, privatization, and underfunding. Ottawa’s real-terms cut to health transfers to the provinces has left hospitals, clinics, and local health units understaffed and unable to provide even the most basic preventative services. Provinces like Alberta have slashed health budgets, while handing out subsidies and tax breaks to the oil giants. Everywhere, routine immunization programs have been hollowed out, family doctors are increasingly inaccessible, and community health services have been starved of resources.

The outcome is clear: the return of diseases once vanquished, soaring mortality from “preventable” causes, and health systems on the brink of collapse.

The resurgence of measles must serve as a warning. The Canadian ruling class, having already condemned tens of thousands to premature death during the COVID-19 pandemic, is normalizing a future in which diseases once suppressed run rampant and new pathogens are allowed to spread unchecked. It intends to further slash social spending in order to pour billions of dollars into militarism and war.

The working class can place no confidence in the capitalist state, its political parties, or the pro-corporate unions. Defending health and life requires a political struggle against the capitalist system itself, which sacrifices the most basic public needs—clean air, safe schools and workplaces, functioning hospitals—to enrich the parasitic elite. The return of measles in Canada proves that only the independent mobilization of the working class, armed with a socialist program, can secure the resources and organization necessary to safeguard public health.



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