

COVID-19 updates for the week of April 25

By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

According to Canada's chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam's April 22 statement on COVID-19 in Canada, she says that with the concerning rise in virus cases seen recently, people should be cautious and maintain public health measures and individual precautions where they're warranted and use common sense in each situation. As of April 25, there were 4,098 cases reported, with 231,267 active cases across the country. Six deaths were reported. From April 11 to 18, the total number of hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients increased from 6,020 to 7,008, and the number of ICU beds occupied rose from 401 to 458. Tam says that recent seven-day averages, from April 16 to 21 across Canada show continued widespread activity across the country, and that laboratory test positivity and wastewater signals remain elevated. She says that while transmission may be nearing a peak according to early signs, it's too soon to ascertain whether a possible increase in in-person contact rates during the recent long weekend could impact these trends. Tam says that the recent rise of hospitalization rates in several jurisdictions, while a concern, appear to be manageable. Given the increased population immunity from high vaccine coverage and many recent infections we could see less of an impact on hospitalization trends than occurred during earlier waves of the pandemic. Nevertheless, keeping infection rates down remains key to protecting vulnerable populations, reducing severe outcomes and dampening the overall impact on the healthcare system, she said in her statement. In Ontario, as of April 25, there were 2,028 new cases reported. There were 1,455 hospitalizations, a rise of 93 cases from yesterday, and 219 people reported in the ICU, up seven people from yesterday. There were 12,736 deaths reported this week since the beginning of the pandemic, an increase of 107 cases since last week. In Hastings Prince Edward, as of April 25, there were 209 new high-risk cases and active high-risk cases amounted to 495 people. There were 19 outbreaks in high-risk settings like LTC homes, and there were 53 deaths reported. There are 26 people who are currently hospitalized at Quinte Health Care hospitals and two people in the ICU. Moderna's new version of COVID-19 vaccine better able to battle Omicron and Delta. A new version of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, in data released April 19, shows it produces a stronger immune response against virus variants like Omicron and Delta than its current COVID-19 vaccine. Targeting nine mutations found in subsequent variants of the COVID-19 virus as well as the original version of it. Four of these mutations are shared with Omicron. In addition to Moderna, Pfizer is also working on a multi-variant effective vaccine going forward. While the current vaccines were synthesized to recognize the spike protein that viruses use to infiltrate human cells, the more said spike protein has changed with the variants, the less likely that the original vaccine can fight against the changed virus. Moderna's new vaccine doubles the antibodies that block the virus from invading human cells and offers more protection against the Omicron and Delta variants, although these results have yet to be peer reviewed. According to Moderna's clinical trial of this enhanced vaccine, the most common side effects were injection site and muscle pain, fatigue and headache. While Moderna believes that updating the vaccines regularly to fight off existing and new variants as time goes by, the Food and Drug Administration is skeptical that such measures are required at this time and that lack of coordination between Moderna, Pfizer and other vaccine makers could complicate the process of selecting the most effective enhanced vaccines to fight these variants if they're deemed necessary. Some scientists also question how effective such enhanced vaccines can ultimately be, due to the fact that that COVID-19 virus is evolving many times faster than the traditional flu.