

COVID-19 updates for the week of March 21

BY MICHAEL RILEY Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In Canada, according to the chief public health officer of Canada Dr. Theresa Tam, in a news release from March 17, the virus activity has levelled off at a high level since mid-February and average daily case counts are now on the rise. The latest data shows a seven-day average of 3,194 new cases daily from March 10 to 16, with 31,517 active cases across Canada. Infection rates are highest among those aged 20 years to 39 years, presenting an ongoing risk for spread into high-risk populations and settings. Variants of the COVID-19 virus have also been increasingly detected in Canada, prompting the recommendation to maintain public health measures and individual precautions to stave off a resurgence of the virus numbers. An average of 2,048 people with COVID-19 were being treated in hospital during the March 10 to 16 period, including 550 being treated in the ICU. During this same period, an average of 31 deaths were reported. In Ontario, as of March 21, there were 1,217 new cases reported. There were 551 hospitalizations, with 181 people reported in the ICU. There were 12,336 deaths reported this week since the beginning of the pandemic, an increase of 80 cases since last week. In Hastings Prince Edward, as of March 21, there were 72 new high-risk cases and active high-risk cases amounted to 185 people. There were eight outbreaks in high-risk settings like LTC homes, and there were 45 deaths reported. There are 11 people who are currently hospitalized at Quinte Health Care hospitals and one person in the ICU. Uptick in COVID-19 cases could be 'tip of the iceberg' warns WHO The World Health Organization is warning that everyone should remain vigilant against COVID-19 as figures show a rise in cases in countries around the world, possibly due to the BA.2 subvariant of the Omicron variant of the virus and the lifting of public health and social measures. The WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus revealed that the increases are happening despite reductions in testing in some countries, which could mean that the case rise could be 'just the tip of the iceberg.' A huge amount of misinformation could also account for low vaccination rates in some countries as well. According to the WHO's numbers, new infections rose by eight per cent globally, with 11 million new cases and just over 43,000 new deaths reported from March 7 to 13. Cases rose by 25 per cent and 27 per cent in South Korea and China, while Africa saw a 12 per cent rise and 14 per cent increase in deaths, and in Europe there was a two per cent rise in cases but no rise in the death rate. Cases are also rising in Europe, with Austria, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the U.K. seeing increases since early March. Experts warn that the U.S. and Canada could see another increase in cases as seen in Europe, soon, potentially driven by BA.2, the lifting of restrictions and possible declining of vaccine immunity. While BA.2 seems to be the most transmissible variant so far, according to the WHO, there are no signs yet that it causes more acute disease, and no evidence that there are any other variants driving these increases.