

## COVID-19 updates for week of April 18

**By Mike Riley Local Journalism Initiative Reporter**

According to Canada's chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam's April 14 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.

She says that the latest national data shows a seven-day average of 8,238 new cases daily from April 7 to 13, with sustained high infection rates continuing to impact COVID-19 severity indicators, especially in areas with higher disease activity. This rise is placing renewed strain on the healthcare system and healthcare workers.

Tam says that provincial and territorial data indicate that an average of 3,206 people with COVID-19 were being treated in hospitals each day from April 7 to 13, which is a 33 per cent increase from last week. This includes 993 people on average who were being treated in the ICU, which is 23 per cent higher than last week. Tam suggests that if the rise in severe illness persists, there could be a gradual increase in the mortality trend. She says that over the past week, there was an average of 36 deaths reported daily, which is 17 per cent higher than last week.

In Ontario, as of April 16, there were 4,201 new cases reported. There were 1,130 hospitalizations, with 185 people reported in the ICU. There were 12,629 deaths reported this week since the beginning of the pandemic, an increase of 102 cases since last week.

In Hastings Prince Edward, as of April 13, there were 170 new high-risk cases and active high-risk cases amounted to 497 people. There were 19 outbreaks in high-risk settings like LTC homes, and there were 51 deaths reported. There are 15 people who are currently hospitalized at Quinte Health Care hospitals and three people in the ICU.

### **Scientists monitoring two new Omicron variants**

Two new Omicron variant sub-types are being monitored by scientists; BA.4 and BA.5. So far, these sub-types have emerged in a few countries like South Africa, the U.K. Denmark and Botswana, although the Omicron BA.2 variant has spread to become the most common and expansive variant of Omicron around the world thus far.

While there are relatively few cases so far, less than 200, the World Health Organization is tracking it very closely and expect it could change to become more widespread.

The WHO says that the mutations in BA.4 and BA.5, known as L452R and F486V, could potentially enable the virus to escape the immune system. One of these mutations, L452R has been seen before in other COVID-19 variants like Delta. Scientists at Louisiana State University Shreveport also say that BA.4 and BA.5 have mutations that could possibly help them out-compete other lineages and that it will be important going forward to develop multi-variant immunizations against the virus.

However, while they continue tracking these variants and will be alert to any changes in their transmissibility or severity, scientists caution that people should not be overly concerned whenever a new variant comes out, as they are apt to as the COVID-19 virus mutates over time.

### **Health Canada approves AstraZeneca antibody combination drug**

A new antibody combination drug to prevent COVID-19 infections in people who are immunocompromised has been approved by Health Canada. Announced April 14 in a Health Canada news release, and courtesy of AstraZeneca, this new drug called Evusheld, is delivered in two injections before COVID-19 exposure. The shots are for those who are unable to get the current vaccines or for those that the vaccines won't provide enough immunity against the virus, but is not approved as a substitute for people who are able

to get the current COVID-19 vaccinations.

The difference between the current vaccines and Evushed is that the former teaches the body to make its own antibodies over a short period of time, while the latter delivers ready-made antibodies to start fighting off the virus immediately.

An 83 per cent decrease in the risk of getting COVID-19 was seen in drug trial data versus a placebo after six months that the company released in Nov. 2021.

While Canada has agreed to get 100,000 doses of Evushed from AstraZeneca this year, Health Canada has placed conditions on the drug's approval, including continuous updates on the safety and efficacy of the drug. They say that lab studies show that it also neutralizes the BA.2 sublineage of the Omicron variant of COVID-19.