

COVID-19 updates for week of April 4

By Mike Riley

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In Canada, according to the chief public health officer of Canada Dr. Theresa Tam, in a news release from April 1, the most significant risks could involve other respiratory illnesses in concert with COVID-19. She stresses that the continual adaptation of the ongoing COVID-19 management to lessen serious outcomes and their deleterious effect on our health care system, and prepare for possible worst case scenarios that will enable Canada to face whatever the pandemic may bring in the future.

Increased transmission is unsurprisingly occurring with the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and the spread of the BA.2 variant. Daily average case counts have increased by 28 per cent nationally, indicating a national resurgence in the period from March 25 to 31. Laboratory positivity during the period from March 23 to 29 increased to 16 per cent and community wastewater data also indicates a rising trend in local case numbers.

The latest data from the provinces and territories shows that the average number of people being treated in hospitals from March 25 to 31 was four per cent higher than last week. The number of people in the ICU during this same time period was also four per cent higher than last week. An average of 36 deaths were reported daily from March 25 to 31. Tam says that keeping infection rates down remains vital to keeping severe illness trends down and protecting vulnerable populations over the coming weeks. Data on April 1 revealed there were 7,127 cases reported that day, 159,569 active cases reported and 20 deaths reported.

In Ontario, as of April 4, there were 2,248 new cases reported. There were 857 hospitalizations, with 168 people were reported in the ICU. There were 12,470 deaths reported this week since the beginning of the pandemic, an increase of 134 cases since last week.

In Hastings Prince Edward, as of April 4, there were 158 new high-risk cases and active high-risk cases amounted to 340 people. There were 10 outbreaks in high-risk settings like LTC homes, and there were 48 deaths reported. There are 20 people who are currently hospitalized at Quinte Health Care hospitals and two people in the ICU.

Guidance on fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine expected soon from NACI

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization will put out guidance on COVID-19 vaccine fourth doses in early April as public health indicators rise across Canada. This announcement comes as the country enters what some are calling the sixth wave of the virus.

The Public Health Agency says they expect NACI's advice on a fourth shot in the coming days. A fourth dose was previously recommended by NACI for people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised six months after getting their third shot. Rising public health indicators and potential hospital overruns if the virus cases surge again has health care professionals concerned. The situation is even more challenging due to burnout in the healthcare field and staff absences due to the pandemic. Consequently, they are urging people to continue wearing masks whenever possible to preclude them getting sick and potentially clogging up the health care system.

In Ontario, the Ontario Hospital Association recorded hospitalizations going up, from 807 this week to 661 the week before. However, Ontario health minister Christine Elliot says there are no plans to reintroduce COVID-19 restrictions like masks despite the rising numbers of cases, although the government reserved the right to do so later on.

Elliot said that Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario's chief medical officer of health will review NACI's guidance on administering possible fourth doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in the next few days and will make his recommendations to the government.

Hearing loss and other auditory issues reported in small numbers post COVID-19 vaccine injection

A report published by the World Health Organization has found extremely rare instances of hearing loss and other auditory issues after getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

Up to Feb. 22, 2021, the Uppsala Monitoring Centre identified hearing loss and tinnitus following COVID-19 vaccinations in 164 cases and 367 cases respectively, arising in 10 countries. However, these cases are out of 11 billion vaccinations administered around the world.

These hearing issues arose on average one day after the vaccine shot, and while there is still limited data on these issues, the WHO recommended further monitoring of the situation to accrue more data.