COVID-19 updates for week of Feb. 7

by MICHAEL RILEYLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter

In Canada, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been 3,096,217 cases of COVID-19, with 34, 381 deaths. During the period from Jan. 28 to Feb. 3, there were 13,977 new cases on average reported across the country. Here in Ontario as of Feb. 7, there were 2,088 new cases reported, with 2,155 people hospitalized and 486 in the Intensive Care Unit. There were 11 deaths reported. As of Jan. 30, 84.1 per cent of Ontarians or 12,396,363 people had gotten their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, while 79.3 per cent, or 11.677,203 individuals had gotten their second dose.In Hastings Prince Edward County, according to Hastings Prince Edward Public Health, there were 108 new high-risk cases of COVID-19, 311 active high-risk cases, 12 outbreaks in high-risk settings like LTC homes and 31 deaths reported as of Feb. 7. The number of people having gotten their first dose of the vaccine was 145,794 while 134,290 have obtained their second dose. The third booster shot has been received by 84,850 people.More sustainable approach to COVID-19 needed says Tam According to Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, a more sustainable approach to COVID-19 needs to be adopted across the country as Canada and the rest of the world will likely be dealing with COVID-19 for months or years to come. She says that further waves will inevitably occur, but a longer term sustained approach and capacity building versus a perpetual crisis mode will be needed heading into the future. She reveals that the Public Health Agency of Canada is communicating with its provincial and territorial counterparts to find that path that will give Canadians some relief after two years of restrictions to try to get back to some kind of normal.Efforts should focus on getting as many people vaccinated as possible to prevent severe infections requiring hospitalizations rather than trying to prevent any new infections of the virus, according to Tam. While the first two vaccination shots offered reasonably good protection against severeCOVID-19, the third booster shot amplified that protection to superior protection, and might even prevent an infection from taking hold.With the booster shot immunization campaign only at 50 per cent of eligible people getting their third shot, Tam emphasized that Canada's priority should be to get as many booster shots administered to as many citizens as possible.Guidelines for vaccinated and unvaccinated people getting the COVID-19 vaccine and booster shots can be found at www.canada.ca/public-health.ca.Global Healthcare waste management systems overwhelmed by COVID-19 According to the World Health Organization, in a report issued on Feb. 1, the global health care waste management systems are being overwhelmed by medical waste being generated by treating the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two years. This overflow of medical waste could put a dangerous strain on human health and the environment.The level of medical waste is estimated by the WHO to be massive. They estimate that there have been 140 million test kits so far generating 2,600 tonnes of plastic and other non-infectious waste and 731,000 litres of chemical waste. Another 144,000 tonnes of waste come from the billions of vaccine doses given globally, in the form of syringes, needles and safety boxes.According to the WHO, polypropylene, a fossil fuel derived plastic is used to manufacture personal protective equipment like single use face masks, and when they are discarded, there are negative effects on the environment. Human health is also at risk from discarded medical waste like used needles and pathogenic microorganisms.The WHO says significant changes are needed to ensure that medical waste is disposed of in a manner that will protect the environment and human health. They suggest solutions like eco-friendly packaging and shipping, safe PPE that is reusable, recyclable and biodegradable, non-burn waste management technologies and better recycling technologies.