

COVID-19 updates for week of March 28

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 25, she says that while daily average case counts have levelled off, there is variability across Canada with several jurisdictions reporting increases. Increased levels of transmission, with the easing of public health restrictions, are not unexpected as the virus continues to circulate widely, according to a laboratory test positivity from March 16 to 22 of 14.5 per cent. On March 25, there were 5,474 cases of COVID-19 reported, with 132,004 active cases. The average number of people with COVID-19 being treated in hospitals each day from March 18 to 24 was 7.4 per cent lower than last week, according to the latest provincial and territorial data. During the same time, the number of people being treated in the ICU daily decreased by 15.3 per cent compared to the previous week, while an average of 34 deaths were reported daily. In Ontario, as of March 28, there were 1,741 new cases reported. There were 655 hospitalizations, with 158 people were reported in the ICU. There were 12,405 deaths reported this week since the beginning of the pandemic, an increase of 69 cases since last week. In Hastings Prince Edward, as of March 28, there were 108 new high-risk cases and active high-risk cases amounted to 209 people. There were eight outbreaks in high-risk settings like LTC homes, and there were 45 deaths reported. There are 16 people who are currently hospitalized at Quinte Health Care hospitals and two people in the ICU.

WHO suspends decision on Canadian COVID-19 vaccine pending policy review Pending a review of its policies, the World Health Organization rejected Quebec's Medicago COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use due to its ties to tobacco company Phillip Morris International, a shareholder in the Canadian pharmaceutical company. Medicago's vaccine, called Covifenz, is temporarily rejected until the WHO comes to a decision that would allow it to potentially still be used for emergency use. Covifenz, expected to be available to the Canadian public by May, has an overall efficacy rate of 71 per cent against variants except Omicron (which was not in circulation when testing was done) and is approved for use in adults aged 18 years to 64 years. The Canadian government has invested \$173 million to help Medicago develop and produce the vaccine and has agreed to purchase 20 million doses, with an option to buy 56 million more. While the WHO explores different policy options for potentially valid health products that are linked to the tobacco industry, and will have a decision soon, Medicago said it will be discussing next steps and may request that Phillip Morris divest its shares of their company to be able to get the vaccine to market as quickly as possible.

Chemical in broccoli shows promising results in preventing and treating COVID-19. Small amounts of a chemical found in broccoli and other cruciferous vegetables, sulforaphane, shows promising results in preventing and treating COVID-19 in cells and in mice. Researchers at Baltimore's John Hopkins Children's Centre found and published these results in the Nature Journal Communications Biology on March 18. Even smaller amounts of sulforaphane combined with antiviral medication remdesivir also showed promising results. Human studies on these findings have yet to be done to conclusively prove these results on human subjects. While the researchers still advocate for the use of vaccines and antiviral agents to combat COVID-19, they say that if the early results hold up, sulforaphane could be a less expensive, safe and readily available commercially treatment for the virus.