

## COVID-19 updates for week of May 9

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According to Canada's chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam's May 5 statement on COVID-19 in Canada, she mentions May 3 to 9 being Mental Health Week across Canada, and offering suggestions and links to people dealing with mental health struggles, especially due to the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic that has taken its toll on not only the physical health of Canadians, but their mental health too.

Tam says that efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 like public health measures and individual precautions are crucial, since the virus' activity is elevated or increasing in many jurisdictions. An average of 7,852 cases were reported daily from April 28 to May 4, a two per cent decrease over the previous week.

Elevated infection rates continue to impact lagging COVID-19 severity indicators, particularly in areas with sustained high levels of disease activity. These persistently high numbers of severe and critical illnesses have placed a prolonged and heavy strain on the health system and healthcare workforce, she says in her statement.

Provincial and territorial data shows an average of 4,261 cases being treated in hospitals every day during the April 28 to May 4 period, which shows a three per cent decrease over last week, according to Tam. This includes 1,458 people on average who were being cared for in the ICU, a five per cent increase from the previous week. A mortality rate of 48 deaths daily from April 28 to May 4 shows that it has levelled off, though continued high rates of infection and increased critical care admissions could see this trend be negatively impacted.

In Ontario, as of May 9, there were 1,206 new cases reported. There were 1,213 hospitalizations, and 201 people reported in the ICU as of that day. There were 12,972 deaths reported this week since the beginning of the pandemic, an increase of 100 cases since last week.

In Hastings Prince Edward, as of May 9, there were 56 new high-risk cases and active high-risk cases amounted to 274 people. There were 14 outbreaks in high-risk settings like LTC homes, and there were 55 deaths reported. There are 32 people who are currently hospitalized at Quinte Health Care hospitals and four people in the ICU.

### **WHO monitoring two new Omicron subvariants**

Two new subvariants of Omicron, called BA.4 and BA.5, are being monitored by the World Health Organization.

More than 300 cases have been reported in several countries since the start of 2022, with most of them in South Africa. Canada has detected three cases as of May 3, two of BA.4 and one of BA.5, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada, which is also continuing to monitor the situation.

The WHO began tracking these subvariants in April, and said they have acquired a few additional mutations that may impact their characteristics. All viruses mutate and have subvariants over time which change their genetic makeup but still maintain the common origin with the original virus.

The WHO says that from data they've studied that BA.4 and BA.5 it appears to have a growth advantage over the other subvariants of Omicron and is about 10 per cent more transmissible. Their impact on hospitalizations and severe illness are uncertain and still being looked at by scientists at this point, although vaccinations appear to offer good protection against them.