

## COVID19 updates for week of Feb. 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 Feb. 28, there are currently 30,864 active cases across the country, with a seven-day average of 2,960 new cases daily from Feb. 19 to Feb. 25. She says that according to provincial and territorial data, that an average of 2,269 people with COVID-19 were being treated in hospitals daily during the period from Feb. 19 to Feb. 25, including 564 who were in the ICU. During this same period of time, on average there were 52 COVID-19 related deaths reported daily. In Ontario, as of Feb. 28, there were 1,315 new cases reported, with 1,605 cases reported as resolved. There were 849 hospitalizations with 279 people in the ICU. There were three deaths reported. In Hastings Prince Edward, as of Feb. 28, there were 68 new high-risk cases and active high-risk cases amounted to 237 people. There were 12 outbreaks in high-risk settings like LTC homes, and there were 39 deaths reported. There are 25 people who are currently hospitalized at Quinte Health Care hospitals and two people are in the ICU. Ontario may lift mask mandate by mid-March According to a comment made by Ontario Premier Doug Ford, the province's mask mandate may be lifted by mid-March, although Ontario's chief medical officer's advice would dictate whether that would happen by then. Dr. Moore stated last week that any such lifting of the mandate would include school settings, but would remain in place for higher risk settings like hospitals and LTC homes. Ivana Yelich, the executive director of media relations with the Office of the Premier of Ontario comments on this; "As Dr. Moore has said previously, he will be reviewing the masking mandate in the coming weeks, but expects that masks will be removed in schools at the same time as most public settings," she says. Made in Canada COVID-19 vaccine authorized by Health Canada A two-dose, plant-based COVID-19 vaccine was authorized by Health Canada on Feb. 24 for use in adults aged 18 years to 64 years, although its effectiveness and safety has not yet been established. Manufactured by a Quebec City based biotechnology company called Medicago, the vaccine is called Covifenz, and clinical trials suggest its is 71 per cent effective protecting against COVID-19 one week after the second dose. The dosing schedule is three weeks between shots. Medicago, along with GlaxoSmithKline submitted its data to Health Canada in December. Data late last year suggests its vaccine is 75.3 per cent effective against the Delta variant when paired with GlaxoSmithKline's booster shot. Covifenz uses recombinant technology, involving the genetic sequence of a virus, with living plants as a host. The virus-like particles that result mimic the shape and dimensions of a virus, allowing the body's immune system to recognize them and fight them off. Health Canada issues COVID-19 rapid test kit warning Health Canada issued a warning on Feb. 24 about possible poisoning hazards with certain ingredients in COVID-19 rapid test kits, with at least 50 calls having been made to poison control centres in Canada over accidental exposure. While safe when used correctly, these rapid test kits contain liquid solutions with chemical preservatives which may be poisonous if ingested or absorbed through the skin. Even small quantities can cause effects in small children and pets. Health Canada suggests keeping these test kits out of reach of children and pets, not swallowing the solution and avoiding eye and skin contact, washing hands thoroughly after use, rinsing well with water if spills occur, follow all instructions for proper disposal, report any side effects or complaints to Health Canada and contact local poison control centres in case of accidental ingestion or exposure.