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Export date: Fri Mar 29 9:08:45 2024 / +0000 GMT

COVID-19 case count and death toll rising fast

Jan. 5, 2021

By Nate Smelle

Although the provincial government paused COVID-19 vaccinations over the holidays, the pandemic did not take a break from wreaking havoc in Ontario, across Canada, and around the world.

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken the lives of more than 1.86-million people, while infecting some 86-million. At the start of 2021, the United States remains the worst impacted country with more than 353,640 dead, and some 20,825,423 infected.

While on Dec. 4 the case count in Canada surpassed 400,000, by the time Bancroft This Week was sent to press on Jan. 5 the total number of confirmed cases nationally had reached 620,828. Throughout the month of December Canada added another 3,604 names to the national death toll; which, as of the afternoon of Jan. 5, had climbed to 16,212 people.

To put these numbers into perspective, it took Canada six months to accumulate its first 100,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and just one month (December) to add its last 200,000+ cases.

Canada's chief public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam released a statement on New Year's Eve indicating that the government was continuing to ?track a range of epidemiological indicators to monitor COVID-19 activity and how it is impacting the health of Canadians and public health, laboratory and healthcare capacity.?

According to provincial and territorial data, Dr. Tam said an average of 3,650 people with COVID-19 were being treated in Canadian hospitals each day during the seven-day period beginning on Dec. 23. Noting that 720 of these patients were being treated in intensive care units, she said during the same period, there were an average of 125 COVID-19-related deaths reported daily.

?This situation continues to burden local health-care resources, particularly in areas where infection rates are highest,? explained Dr. Tam.

?These impacts affect everyone, as the health-care workforce and health system bear a heavy strain, important elective medical procedures are delayed or postponed, adding to pre-existing backlogs.?

Dr. Tam said the Public Health Agency of Canada along with the provinces, territories and international partners are working together to identify more contagious COVID-19 variants such as those identified in the United Kingdom and South Africa. Confirming that the new COVID-19 variant has been detected in Canada, she said there have now been reported in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec.

?It is expected that other variants of concern will likely be found in Canada as monitoring continues,? Dr. Tam explained.

?While early data suggest that the United Kingdom and South African variants may be more transmissible, to date there is no evidence that there is any impact on disease severity, antibody response, or vaccine effectiveness.?

While the government and public health agencies continue to ?prepare the way for widespread and lasting control of COVID-19 through safe and effective vaccines,? Dr. Tam said Canadians are urged to continue with individual practices that keep people and their families safer. These protective measures include: staying home; self-isolating if any symptoms are present; following local public health advice; physical distancing; practicing good hand, cough and surface hygiene;and wearing a face mask.

Dr. Tam said Canadians can also ?go the extra mile? by sharing credible information on COVID-19 risks and prevention practices

and measures to reduce COVID-19 in communities; and by downloading the COVID-19 Alert app to break the cycle of infection and help limit the spread of COVID-19.

On average, during the month of December 29.5 people in Ontario lost their lives to COVID-19 each day. The number of Ontarians dying daily due to the disease was up by more than a dozen from 17.3 people a day in November. So far in 2021, Ontario's average daily death toll has been accelerating (37.25 deaths per day).

In Ontario, on Dec. 4, 2020 the provincial case count was 123,526, and the death toll stood at 3,737. Just a month later, Ontario's total number of confirmed cases was more than 199,000, and the list of the dead in the province had grown by nearly 1,000 names (4,702 dead, Jan. 5, 2021).

Residents of Ontario's long-term care homes continue to be one of the worst affected populations in Canada. Since the pandemic flared up in Ontario last January, 11,511 residents have contracted the coronavirus, 2,830 of which have died as a result of the illness. As of Jan. 5, 4,479 staff working in the province's long-term care system have been infected, and eight have died.

Despite the lessons learned during the first wave of the pandemic - highlighted by reports from the Canadian Armed Forces detailing the deplorable conditions in several of Ontario's long-term care facilities - the situation for those living or working in long-term care appears to be getting worse. According to the most recent data from the province, on Jan. 4, 12 more long-term care homes announced that they were experiencing an outbreak of COVID-19. Currently, 216 (34.5 per cent) of the province's 626 long-term care homes are dealing with an outbreak.

At the moment there are 21 active cases reported within Hastings and Prince Edward counties. On Jan. 4, the Hastings Prince Edward Public Health Unit confirmed that two of the long-term care facilities in the region are experiencing an outbreak. The first facility-wide outbreak was declared at The Richmond Retirement Residence in Belleville on Dec. 21, 2020. The health unit declared the second facility-wide outbreak at the Hastings Manor in Belleville on Jan. 1, 2021.

Acknowledging how the health unit's staff ?are working diligently to keep our community safe,? chief medical officer of health and CEO at HPEPH, Dr. Piotr Oglaza advised people to ?Stay at home and only socialize with people in your household. Limiting your close contacts is one of the best things you can do to stop the spread of COVID-19.?

For more information about how to reduce the spread of COVID-19, visit: www.hpePublicHealth.ca. Non-medical emergencies, outbreaks or a reportable disease that require immediate assistance can be reported by calling: 613-966-5500/1-800-267-2803 and following the prompts.