

COVID-19 updates for week of Feb. 14

by MICHAEL RILEY Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

There have been 3,170,649 cases of COVID-19 reported in Canada, 10,632 of them reported Feb. 11. Active cases were reported at 146,680 while resolved cases came in at 2,988,738. There were 113 deaths reported on Feb. 11 with total deaths coming in at 35,231. Nearly 90 per cent (88 per cent) of those vaccine eligible have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 83 per cent have had two doses. The third booster dose percentage lags behind, with only 43 per cent of Canadians having gotten it by Feb. 10, according to Health Canada. In Ontario, as of Feb. 13, there were 1,765 cases reported, with 862 active cases, 171 hospitalizations, eight people in the ICU and one person on a ventilator. The total case count since Jan. 20, 2020 is 1,074,485 with 40,921 hospitalized and 12,101 deaths reported. Eight new deaths were reported as of Feb. 13. In Hastings Prince Edward County, there were 84 new high-risk cases and 381 active high-risk cases reported as of Feb. 14. Eight people have been hospitalized with two people in the ICU. Eleven deaths have been reported in high-risk settings like LTC facilities, and 32 deaths have been reported. People who have gotten their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in HPE number 145,999, while 134,888 people have had their second dose and 85,573 have received their third dose booster shot. Survey results on lifting COVID-19 restrictions According to Leger survey results released Feb. 10, nearly 30 per cent of Canadians believe it's time to lift COVID-19 restrictions and learn to live with the virus, while 43 per cent feel that such restrictions should be eased carefully. The other 28 per cent were evenly split between those who don't want to lift the restrictions and those who want to lift them all immediately. While public health experts concede that people are tired of the pandemic restrictions, they also caution that removing them too quickly or without enough forethought, could be a bad idea. Instead, they should be scaled back safely and gradually, based on science and public health expertise. Ontario vaccine passport gone by March 1 On Feb. 12, Ontario Premier Doug Ford informed Ontarians that the vaccine passport system may soon be removed, on the advice of Ontario's chief medical officer Dr. Kieran Moore, who believes they've fulfilled their purpose. The vaccine passport system requires people to show proof they've been fully vaccinated when entering indoor places like dining facilities, meeting and event spaces, gyms, concert venues and other settings. As of Feb. 14, Ford had announced that the vaccine passport system would be lifted as of March 1. Ford emphasized that the plans to do away with the vaccine passport system had nothing to do with the current trucker protests happening in Ottawa and in other cities across the province and that it had been in the works before the protest started. Ontario state of emergency declared Feb. 11 At a press conference on Feb. 11, Ontario declared a state of emergency due to the truck protests going into their third week in Ottawa, similar protests in various cities across the province and the truck blockade since Feb. 7 at the Ambassador Bridge that connects Windsor to Detroit, Michigan. The truckers' protest was initially to rally against the vaccine mandates for truckers who cross the Canada-U.S. border. While it started out about the mandates affecting cross-border truckers, it expanded to protest all COVID-19 restrictions and a call for them to end. Premier Doug Ford's government enacted orders making it illegal and punishable to block goods, services and people along critical infrastructure like the aforementioned Ambassador Bridge, as well as airports, highways, ports and other bridges. The state of emergency also makes it illegal to block municipal roadways and prevent ambulances and public transports from getting through. Fines carry penalties of up to \$100,000 a day or up to a year in prison, with possible suspension of commercial and personal driver's licences. The Ambassador Bridge blockade is costing millions of dollars per day to the Canada and U.S. economies and job losses at some manufacturing plants. Ford told the protesters that their right to make a political statement does not outweigh the right of people to earn a living, to get food and supplies across the Canada/U.S. border or the right of the citizens of downtown Ottawa to live peacefully and free from the harassment and chaos caused by the protests. By Feb. 13, Windsor police had made over two dozen arrests and were working to completely clear the protest blockade from the Ambassador Bridge which was done by the end of day. In Ottawa, a deal has been reached between Mayor Jim Watson and the organizers of the truckers' protest to move some of the 400 vehicles away from residential neighbourhoods and closer to Parliament Hill starting Feb. 14, to reduce the disruptions on Ottawa residents. If this occurs by noon on Feb. 14, Watson has agreed to meet with the organizers to seek out a long-term solution to the protest, now in its third week. Similar protests in other parts of Ontario, like Toronto, Fort Erie and Sudbury, show no signs yet of dispersing.