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OPEN LETTER FROM DOCTORS IN THE TRANSPORTATION AND TOURISM SECTOR



Chief Medical Officers of Health for Air Canada, Toronto Pearson, and Westjet call on Governments to shift PCR testing from airports to communities

TORONTO, Jan. 17, 2022 /CNW/ - Dear Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., Minister of Health; Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada; Hon. Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier of Ontario and Minister of Health; and Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health:

Over the last two months, Omicron has quickly become the predominant variant of COVID-19. As it spreads throughout our communities, we need to ensure Canada's limited testing resources are being used where Canadians need them most—to support our communities, schools, hospitals and long-term care homes.

As the government has ramped up testing at airports for international arrivals, we have seen frontline workers struggle to get PCR tests and lab processing capacity decrease significantly. There is a growing discrepancy between resources allocated to asymptomatic travellers and to those who need it most. In the most recent week of [reported data](#), over 123,000 PCR tests were conducted at Canada's airports with an average positivity rate of 3 per cent. Meanwhile, the positivity rate in our communities is now approximately 30 per cent and could be higher due to the under-reporting of positivity from a lack of tests.

A recent study prepared for the Manchester Airports Group found that travel testing at best delayed the peak of cases by no more than 5 days, and made total case counts only 3 per cent lower. This was because Omicron was prevalent in the communities long before it was detected as a variant of concern in South Africa. Indeed, here in Canada as well, we have learned that Omicron was present and circulating in our communities long before the first official case was declared in Canada.

As every person travelling to Canada must take a PCR test prior to getting on a plane inbound to Canada and must be fully vaccinated, there is no good public health rationale for a second test upon arrival. We know that the primary concern for Omicron is in the community. By extension, the primary need for testing is in our community; not at our airports. Now is the time to act. We call on the Government of Canada to work with Ontario to implement the following measures immediately to support our healthcare system and our communities:

- Remove mandatory arrivals testing from airports and shift these scarce resources to our schools, community and healthcare system.
- Revert to surveillance arrival testing of international air passengers.
- Require mandatory isolation for persons arriving from an international location if they are exhibiting symptoms or test positive on a surveillance test. Travellers who are asymptomatic after receiving their negative pre-departure test before travel to Canada should not be required to isolate.

Collectively, our organizations have worked hard to keep travel safe, and we have achieved a positivity rate that is ten times less than community spread. Now is the time to shift testing resources to where they're needed most. Removing arrivals PCR testing from Toronto Pearson airport alone would free up 8,000 tests a day for the GTA, which will help keep our most vulnerable—those in long-term care, hospitals and our children attending school—safe.

Now is the time to put scarce testing resources where Canadians need them most: in our communities and not in our airports.

Dr. Jim Chung Chief Medical Officer – Air Canada	Dr. Edward Wasser Chief Medical Officer – Toronto Pearson	Dr. Tammy McKnight Chief Medical Officer - Westjet Airlines
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