

COVID-19

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Local News

Confirmed COVID-19 variant cases jump by 179 in Quebec, including in schools

The B.1.351 variant — first detected in South Africa and shown to be more resistant to some vaccines — has spread to a fifth region in the province.

Aaron Derfel • Montreal Gazette

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Dr. Horacio Arruda, Quebec's chief public health officer, noted that around 21 per cent of COVID-19 cases in Montreal comprise the new variants. In the Capitale-Nationale region, it's 33 per cent, he added. PHOTO BY JACQUES BOISSINOT /The Canadian Press

The more contagious COVID-19 variants continued to spread across Quebec on Tuesday, with the number of confirmed cases rising by 179 to a cumulative total of 522.

Meanwhile, seven schools — four in Montreal and three in Laval — announced they had suspected variant cases among students, according to covidcolesquebec.org, the website run by Nuns' Island parent Olivier Drouin that tracks COVID-19 in the educational sector.



Talmud Torah Elementary School in Côte-des-Neiges and Michelangelo International Elementary School in Rivières-des-Prairies are closing temporarily as a result of the variants. Michelangelo is overseen by the English Montreal School Board. Although the EMSB had installed air purifiers in 30 of its buildings, it did not deem it was necessary at Michelangelo.

The latest figures by Quebec's public health institute found that the B.1.351 variant — first detected in South Africa and shown to be more resistant to some vaccines, including the one by AstraZeneca — has spread to a fifth region in the province: the Montérégie, with one confirmed case. The variant first appeared in Abitibi-Témiscamingue in western Quebec, where the number of confirmed infections has

climbed by five to 100.

(Lanaudière confirmed a second B.1.351 variant case Tuesday. The other regions with B.1.351 are the Laurentians and Montreal, each with one case.)

However, the variant that is circulating the most is B.1.1.7, which originated in the U.K. and has been found to be at least 50 per cent more transmissible than the older strains of the coronavirus. The number of confirmed cases of B.1.1.7 — which is also considered to be more lethal — jumped by 118 to 311 in Montreal. The total number of B.1.1.7 cases in Quebec now stands at 413.

INSPQ	RÉGION SOCIO SANITAIRE (RSS) March 16	B.1.1.7 ÉMERGENCE ROYAUME-UNI	B.1.351 ÉMERGENCE AFRIQUE DU SUD	P.1 ÉMERGENCE BRÉSIL	AUTRES ¹	TOTAL
01 - Bas-Saint-Laurent						
02 - Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean						
03 - Capitale-Nationale		12 +9				12
04 - Mauricie et Centre-du-Québec						
05 - Estrie		9 +4				9
06 - Montréal		311 +118	1	1	2	315
07 - Outaouais						
08 - Abitibi-Témiscamingue			100 +5			100
09 - Côte-Nord						
10 - Nord-du-Québec						
11 - Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine						
12 - Chaudière-Appalaches						
13 - Laval		29 +12				29
14 - Lanaudière		8 +2	2 +1			10
15 - Laurentides		29 +16	1			30
16 - Montérégie		15 +11	1 +1			16
Inconnu			1			1
Hors Québec						
Ensemble du Québec		413	106	1	2	522 +179

However, that is half the picture. The other half are presumptive variant cases. The Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ) revised that total downward by 66 to 2,179. (The INSPQ has previously explained that once confirmed, cases are withdrawn from its chart on presumptive variants. The INSPQ had also removed presumptive cases at one point because it had counted them twice.)

Still, the INSPQ's chart on presumptive cases shows that the number in Chaudière-Appalaches has nearly doubled, to 43 from 22.

Source: INSPQ

A presumptive case is indeed a more transmissible so-called variant of concern that awaits lengthier genetic sequencing to determine its lineage: B.1.1.7, B.1.351 or P.1, the strain that is sweeping through Brazil, causing a spike in hospitalizations.

On Tuesday evening, Premier François Legault warned B.1.1.7 will become the dominant strain by the end of April.

“We have to be realistic. By the end of next month, the majority of cases in Quebec will be with this variant,” Legault said.

Despite the proliferation of the variants, Legault defended his decision to reopen theatres and concert
<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/confirmed-covid-19-variant-cases-jump-by-179-in-quebec>

Despite the proliferation of the variants, Legault defended his decision to reopen theatres and concert halls in Montreal and other red zones as of March 26. In a previous announcement, the government scheduled the reopening of gyms on March 26, too.

“We still consider that it’s under control,” Legault said. “We have to be prudent. That’s why we announced only a few new measures.”

Dr. Horacio Arruda, Quebec’s chief public health officer, noted that around 21 per cent of COVID-19 cases in Montreal comprise the new variants. In the Capitale-Nationale region, it’s 33 per cent, he added.

The Laboratoire de santé publique du Québec is now screening all positive COVID-19 samples for variants. Although such screening (known in French as “criblage”) is faster than genetic sequencing, there could still be some lag time in reporting results.

These variants are lurking behind the overall number of COVID-19 cases, which have declined for three days in a row in the province and for four days in Montreal.

It’s worth noting that a similar scenario of declining cases played out in Ontario, which was hit earlier with the variants than Quebec, and which may now be at the start of a third COVID-19 resurgence. On Tuesday, Ontario reported a total of 1,208 confirmed variant cases, up by 27. Ontario’s cumulative tally for presumptive variant cases rose by 501 to 9,131 — a stark reminder of what might lie ahead for Quebec.

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