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Opening Remarks

for

**Dr. Harpreet Kochhar, President,
Public Health Agency of Canada**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

**April 5, 2022
Ottawa, ON**

Allotted speaking time: 5 minutes (625 words maximum)

Speech length: Target 125 words per minute

625 words currently

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the work the Public Health Agency of Canada is undertaking in response to the Audit of Enforcement of Quarantine and COVID-19 Testing Orders.

Joining me today are:

- Brigitte Diogo, Vice President Health Security & Regional Operations Branch
 - Jennifer Lutfallah, Vice President Border Measures Operations, Health Security & Regional Operations Branch
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Public Health Agency of Canada has directed the implementation of border restrictions and border control measures to help prevent travellers from spreading the virus that causes COVID-19 in Canada.

- While our approach has evolved, our guidance and advice continue to be based on the latest available science, epidemiology and expert opinion.
- The Agency accepts both of the Office of the Auditor General’s recommendations as outlined in the audit report. And, work is already underway to address them.

ADDRESSING RECOMMENDATIONS

- As you are aware, the Auditor General’s audit covered the period of July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. Since that time, the Public Health Agency of Canada has developed an action plan to address the audit recommendations.

I will take a minute to highlight the key components of the plan:

- The Agency will continue to engage with its provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure maximum collaboration when following up with travellers. In particular, we will continue to focus on those who have tested positive.
- We are renewing our efforts to engage law enforcement partners, working to identify barriers to reporting, and identify some interim and possible long-term solutions that will increase reporting on referral outcomes. For example, by providing an option for police to report if a visit is “not completed” so PHAC can assess how many referrals have or have not been actioned, and by focusing law enforcement referrals on high and urgent priorities only.
- The Agency is working with testing providers to develop innovative solutions to better reconcile traveller data provided to PHAC with test result data in the near-term while also developing requirements for an improved end-to-end system to enhance automated tracking and improve overall data quality.
- For example, to mitigate unmatched test results due to errors or inconsistencies in data submitted by travellers, PHAC worked closely with CBSA and testing providers to improve the completeness and quality of data fields used for matching.

- Within just over four months of the launch of the Canada Border Testing Program in February of 2021, on-arrival and post-arrival test completion increased by 20%, to 95% and 82% respectively. This was a direct result of efforts by the Agency, in conjunction with testing providers, to address barriers to test completion, such as reducing virtual appointment wait times and ensuring materials were available in a diverse set of languages.
- We are also looking at how we can improve and streamline methods for assessing data quality internally.
- We are implementing GBA+ considerations to mitigate any potential adverse impacts that existing and future programs have on diverse and vulnerable groups.
- Throughout the pandemic, PHAC has developed and implemented mitigations to identify disparate impacts on border measures on vulnerable groups, for example, providing tailored accommodations where possible and making amendments to Orders in Council to create exemptions for several cohorts of potentially vulnerable travellers. The Agency has also provided specialized training on gender and diversity considerations to frontline staff at the border, including training on bias.
- Finally, we are updating plans for administering and enforcing emergency orders in future outbreaks. This work will include incorporating lessons learned from the current pandemic.
- Some of the work I just outlined has already begun. And some will begin as the pandemic winds down and the Agency and its partners shift from emergency response mode to more normal operations.
- As I mentioned, the Public Health Agency of Canada agrees with both of the recommendations made in the Auditor General's report. However, I would like to note that by focusing only on select metrics – for example, the records of stay for travellers who stayed at a Government-Authorized Hotel – the report's findings do not account for all of the layers of the compliance and enforcement program and how they work together.

Multiple layers are working together to limit the introduction and spread of COVID-19 and its variants in Canada. Some measures take place before a traveller arrives at the border, and some are at or after the border.

Additionally, there is work being done to educate travellers so they can prepare and plan their travel accordingly.

- Together, these layers work to reduce the risk and limit the spread of COVID-19 by travellers.

CONCLUSION

- The Public Health Agency of Canada will continue to review findings and recommendations from this audit report. We will also review recommendations from other audits, evaluations and lessons learned.
- This information will help inform our future planning so that the Agency is in a better position to respond to any future global health events.
- While Canada began a phased approach to easing border measures in July 2021 for fully vaccinated travellers, the Agency took quick action at our borders in November 2021, to mitigate travel-related importation of the Omicron variant, through enhanced testing and quarantine requirements and travel restrictions.
- The situation at our borders is fluid and we will continue to evolve our measures when and where necessary to protect the health and safety of all Canadians.

Thank you.

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1. Key Messages

- PHAC agrees with the two recommendations, which align with actions already planned.
- PHAC appreciates that the OAG's report was focused on a specific period, July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021
- By necessity, this report focused on specific, isolated metrics (for example, records for travellers who stayed at a GAA).
- As such, report could not account for how the layers of PHAC's compliance and enforcement program work together (e.g. before the border, at the border, and after the border), to limit the introduction and spread of COVID-19 and its variants in Canada.

Actions to address the recommendations

- PHAC will **continue to engage with its provincial and territorial counterparts** to ensure maximum collaboration in following up with travellers, particularly those who have tested positive or are in quarantine.
- PHAC will **continue efforts to engage law enforcement partners** with a particular focus on seeking information regarding referral outcomes for priority cases to further monitor traveller compliance and adjust its risk-based approach to compliance and enforcement, as necessary.
- PHAC will **continue to update its Gender Based Analysis+ assessment** and incorporate results in the implementation of future border measures.

- PHAC also **provided specialized training** on gender and diversity considerations to **frontline staff** at the border and at DQFs, including training on bias (launched in September 2021), security awareness, and de-escalation.

PHAC has developed an action plan to address the recommendations from this audit.

- Identifies some short and medium term actions to address the recommendations, realize immediate improvements, and position PHAC to administer necessary border measures in the longer term.
- Recognizes that access to timely and reliable data is a key component to successfully implementing border measures - PHAC has committed to making key systems improvements.
- Acknowledges the value of knowing the outcomes of referrals made to police partners, as this information can be used, in part, to evaluate the efficacy of PHAC's enforcement of border measures. PHAC has committed to improving these processes.

a. Management Response Action Plan (MRAP)

- PHAC has developed an action plan to address the recommendations from this audit.
- Identifies some **short and medium term actions** to address the recommendations, realize immediate improvements, and position PHAC to administer necessary border measures in the longer term.
- Recognizes that **access to timely and reliable data** is a key component to successfully implementing border measures - PHAC has committed to making key systems improvements.

- Acknowledges the **value of knowing the outcomes of referrals** made to police partners, as this information can be used, in part, to evaluate the efficacy of PHAC's enforcement of border measures. PHAC has committed to improving these processes.

b. MRAP Chart (see separate document)

2. Recommendations

- a. [Recommendation 1 - Improved Tracking and SGBA+](#)
- b. [Recommendation 2 - Improved Information Use](#)

a. Rec #1 - Improved Tracking and SGBA+

Recommendation 1

PHAC should improve its enforcement of emergency orders imposed to limit the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 by

improving its automated tracking and data quality so it can better follow up with travellers who are subject to border measures

implementing gender-based analysis plus considerations to mitigate any potential adverse effects of existing and future programs on diverse and vulnerable groups

On improving automated tracking and data quality:

- **Short term: Working with test providers to:**
 - Improve overall data quality
 - Increase our ability to reconcile test data with the traveller information we receive from the Canada Border Services Agency.

- **Long term:** Developing requirements for an **improved end-to-end system** to increase automated tracking and improve overall data quality. An **investment plan for this initiative is under development.**

On implementing GBA+ analysis:

- **Developed and implemented mitigations** to identified disparate impacts of border measures on vulnerable groups,
 - To the extent possible, and by operational policy, **tailored accommodations were provided** for families/caregivers who are required to stay in designated quarantine facilities (DQF, as of March 2020), and government-authorized accommodations (GAA, as of February 2021).
- **Amendments to OICs** made to create exemptions for several cohorts of potentially vulnerable travellers, including:
 - Persons living in **transborder communities** (e.g. Akwesasne);
 - Persons living in **remote communities** who need to cross the Canada-U.S. land border in order to access essential services or the necessities of life; and,
 - Those in **compassionate circumstances** (e.g. to be present for the final moments of life for a loved one, or attend a funeral or end-of-life ceremony).
- Provided **specialized training on gender and diversity** considerations to **frontline staff** at the border and at designated quarantine facilities, including training on bias (launched in September 2021), security awareness, and de-escalation.
 - **November 2021**, with ongoing renewal of the emergency orders, the Agency started to **update its GBA+ analysis** and to incorporate its results in the implementation of future border measures.

b. Rec #2 - Improved Information Use

Recommendation 2

PHAC should better use information on the outcomes of its referrals for follow-up to assess whether its enforcement approach is working to limit the importation of the virus that causes COVID-19 and its variants. The agency should also improve its capability to achieve a consistent enforcement approach to border measures nationwide, including exploring other tools that could be used in all Canadian jurisdictions

- Actively exploring mechanisms to make enforcement of non-compliance with border measures more consistent in all jurisdictions across Canada.
- For example, **January 19 and 21, 2022**, PHAC held an initial **meeting with police partners** (RCMP, Sûreté Québec and the Ontario Provincial Police) to **discuss hurdles** that police forces may be facing regarding the outcome of referrals and to **brainstorm solutions** to improve reporting. Identified both immediate actionable items and longer-term efforts. These efforts are ongoing.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN (MRAP)

In response to the recommendations of the Report - Audit of Enforcement of Quarantine and COVID-19 Testing Orders
of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada

Report Ref. No.	OAG Recommendation	Departmental Response	Description of Final Expected Outcome/Result	Expected Final Completion Date	Key Interim Milestones (Description/Dates)	Responsible Organization/ Point of Contact (Name, Position, Tel #)	Indicator of Achievement (For Committee Use Only)
Para. 47	<p>PHAC should improve its enforcement of emergency orders imposed to limit the spread of COVID-19 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving its automated tracking and data quality so it can better follow up with travellers who are subject to border measures; and • Implementing GBA+ considerations to mitigate any potentially adverse impacts of existing and future programs on diverse and vulnerable groups. 	<p>Agreed. In November 2021, the Agency initiated an assessment of its IT systems and data requirements for border measures. The results of this assessment will inform a review of current IT systems and broad requirements to improve data and address issues related to the consistency and quality of data used for matching test results to traveller records. The Agency will also improve and streamline internal methods for assessing data quality. In conjunction with efforts to improve matching and data quality, the Agency will continue to review and, where necessary, expand upon existing practices for contacting and tracking travellers who test positive for COVID-19, or who are suspected of non-compliance.</p> <p>The Agency agrees that automated tracking would have improved tracking of travellers at government-authorized hotels when this requirement was first introduced. The Agency implemented an automated process in June 2021 to obtain better check-in and check-out data to facilitate enforcement against non-compliant travellers. While this requirement was phased out soon afterwards, the Agency found that the automated process had enhanced program administration and integrity, and it has initiated an assessment of its IT systems and data requirements related to border measures. This assessment and other separate reviews of the pandemic response will help to identify requirements for future responses.</p> <p>Regarding GBA+ considerations, while the emergency orders issued under section 58 of the <i>Quarantine Act</i> are not subject to the <i>Cabinet Directive on Regulations</i>, nor the requirement for a GBA+ analysis, the Agency nonetheless completed a GBA+ analysis to inform the development of border measures. The Agency also provided specialized training on gender and diversity considerations to frontline staff at the border and at designated quarantine facilities, including training on bias (launched in September 2021), security awareness, and de-escalation. In November 2021, in the context of the ongoing renewal of the emergency orders, the Agency started to update its GBA+ analysis and to incorporate its results in the implementation of future border measures.</p>	<p>1. PHAC has methods and systems in place that enable the automated capture and use of quality data to support border measures.</p> <p>2. Potential disparate impacts of PHAC-led COVID-19 border measures on vulnerable groups are identified, and appropriate mitigations (consistent with public health objectives) are identified and implemented.</p>	<p>1. April 2024, subject to approval of the proposed solution and dependent on the approval and allocation of appropriate resources for systems development.</p> <p>2. GBA+ analysis on current PHAC-led border measures is updated by the end of Q4 FY 2021-22.</p> <p>Formal integration of GBA+ considerations into the border policy process will then be incorporated, where applicable and feasible, into the implementation of new border measures on an ongoing</p>	<p>For Outcome/Result 1:</p> <p>Access to timely and reliable data is a key component to successfully implementing border measures for mitigating the risks of international travel during the pandemic. PHAC is working to enhance existing system functionality in the near term in order to improve data quality and tracking.</p> <p>1. End Q1 FY2022-23: Integrate Quarantine Case Management System (QCMS) Quarantine Officer (QO) and Compliance and Enforcement (C&E) Modules, as much as technically feasible.</p> <p>Enhancing existing functionality will allow PHAC to take immediate steps to address the recommendations of the OAG report to improve data quality until a more comprehensive solution can be developed and implemented.</p> <p>The Directors General responsible for Border Measures Information Systems Governance Committee will steer the identification, requirement development, and option analysis to deliver the long-term systems capability required to manage future pandemic-related border measures.</p> <p>2. End FY 2021-22: Establish an integrated project team to act on the outcomes of the IT systems and data assessment.</p> <p>3. End Q2 FY 2022-23: Complete assessment of IT systems and data requirements for border measures.</p> <p>4. End Q3 FY 2022-23: Identify requirements for enhancing IT systems.</p>	<p>1. Marie-Hélène Lévesque (DG HSRO/CCEE)</p> <p>2-4. HSRO and IMSD co-lead (specific responsibilities and champion TBD)</p>	

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN (MRAP)

In response to the recommendations of the Report - Audit of Enforcement of Quarantine and COVID-19 Testing Orders
of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada

				<p>basis for the duration of the pandemic.</p>	<p>5. End FY22-23: Secure Senior Management support for proposed solution and seek source of funding for system implementation.</p> <p><u>For Outcome/Result 2:</u></p> <p>In the context of the ongoing renewal of the emergency orders, the Agency will update its GBA+ analysis, and will incorporate its results in the implementation of future border measures, as feasible.</p> <p>End Q1 FY 2022-23: A GBA+ lens is considered during the following processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Development of PHAC-led border measures to the extent feasible, given the status of emergency orders under section 58 of the <i>Quarantine Act</i> in respect of the <i>Cabinet Directive on Regulations</i>; and ii. Operationalization of PHAC-led border measures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Katarina Stephenson (DG CBTH) ii. Luc Brisebois (DG HSRO/RO), and Marie-Hélène Lévesque (DG HSRO/CCEE) 	
				<p>1. Implement new automated processes to systematically obtain</p>			

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN (MRAP)

In response to the recommendations of the Report - Audit of Enforcement of Quarantine and COVID-19 Testing Orders of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada

Para. 57	<p>PHAC should use information on the outcomes of its referrals for follow-up better, in order to assess whether its enforcement approach is working to limit the introduction of COVID-19 and its variants. It should also improve its capability to achieve a consistent enforcement approach to border measures nationwide, including exploring other tools in certain jurisdictions that could be used in all Canadian jurisdictions.</p>	<p>Agreed. The Agency continues to have regular meetings and discussions with the law enforcement community regarding enforcement of the <i>Quarantine Act</i>. Outcomes reported for priority referrals have improved since the beginning of the year. In November 2021, the Agency also renewed efforts to engage law enforcement partners, with a particular focus on seeking information regarding referral outcomes for priority cases. The Agency will use this information in its risk-based approach to compliance and enforcement.</p> <p>The Agency's compliance and enforcement program includes a full suite of activities that are applied consistently to all travellers in all Canadian jurisdictions. However, as noted in the audit report, the issuance of tickets under the <i>Quarantine Act</i> can only occur in jurisdictions that have signed onto the <i>Contraventions Act</i> regime. Starting in 2022-23, additional mechanisms will be assessed to enforce the <i>Quarantine Act</i> more consistently at a national level. In addition, the Agency will continue to engage with its provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure maximum collaboration in following up with travellers, particularly those who have tested positive or are in quarantine.</p>	<p>1. PHAC will implement processes using the information on outcomes of referrals to continually assess and evaluate the efficacy of PHAC's enforcement approach to border measures.</p> <p>2. PHAC will implement a consistent national <i>Quarantine Act</i> enforcement approach to ensure that travellers arriving in different Canadian jurisdictions are subject to the same enforcement processes, procedures, and mechanisms, including potential consequences for non-compliance.</p>	<p>information from referrals by the end of Q1 FY2023-24, subject to agreement by provinces and territories.</p> <p>2. If no legislative changes are required, PHAC will implement a permanent national <i>Quarantine Act</i> Compliance and Enforcement (C&E) program by the beginning of January 2024, pending PHAC Senior Management approval of the proposed approach, and if appropriate funding is in place.</p> <p>If legislative changes are required to implement the proposed approach, PHAC will, by January 2024, seek authority</p>	<p><u>For Outcome/Result 1:</u></p> <p>Provinces and territories are engaged through the Crime Prevention and Policing Committee (CPPC), an Assistant Deputy Minister-level federal-provincial-territorial forum to discuss crime prevention and policing policy issues within and across jurisdictions. Under the auspices of the CPPC, PHAC will propose an adhoc Law Enforcement (LE) sub-working group (WG) to identify administrative burdens and other obstacles to law enforcement organizations consistently reporting outcomes of referrals to PHAC.</p> <p>Membership in the WG should be comprised of those Police of Jurisdiction (PoJ) that receive the highest volume of referrals, such as those responsible for the largest international airports or land ports of entry (e.g., RCMP, Calgary Police Service, Peel Regional Police, Montreal Police Service, Windsor Police, Sûreté du Québec).</p> <p>The sub-WG will identify barriers to reporting and propose solutions before returning to the larger plenary CPPC for discussion and implementation planning, if the group reaches agreement on a way forward. The focus will be on identifying near-term solutions to de-duplicate the reporting process to reduce the administrative burden on PoJ and facilitate systematic, but simplified, reporting on the outcome of referrals in a manner compatible with current PoJ and PHAC systems.</p> <p>Once improved PoJ reporting systems and methods are put in place and the frequency of reports increases, PHAC will then use these results to analyze outcomes, look for trends and patterns, and identify gaps in its enforcement of border measures. The information will factor into</p>	<p>Marie-Hélène Lévesque, Director General, Centre for Compliance, Enforcement, and Exemptions, HSRO</p>
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MANAGEMENT RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN (MRAP)

In response to the recommendations of the Report - Audit of Enforcement of Quarantine and COVID-19 Testing Orders
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				<p>to introduce legislative amendments, pending PHAC Senior Management approval of proposed approach.</p>	<p>PHAC's risk-based approach to C&E and be used on an ongoing basis to develop specific solutions to address or mitigate any issues identified.</p> <p>In addition, under the authority of the Special Advisory Committee on COVID-19, PHAC will establish and convene an FPT committee on compliance and enforcement. The FPT Committee on COVID-19 Compliance and Enforcement (the Committee) will bring together federal, provincial, and territorial partners engaged in compliance and enforcement of COVID-19 border measures to discuss compliance promotion, verification and enforcement related to border measures, and the linkages between federal, provincial, and territorial activities. This committee will also be used as a forum to promote best practices and contribute to a more efficient national approach.</p> <p>Enhancements to IT systems requirements and capabilities may delay the timelines below.</p> <p>Milestones for Outcome/Result 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of FY2021-22): LE Reporting WG launched and Terms of Reference developed • End Q1 FY2022-23): FPT Committee on COVID-10 Compliance and Enforcement established and Terms of Reference developed • End Q2 FY2022-23): WG findings reported to main CPPC • Start Q3 FY2022-23): Development of new and improved reporting processes (subject to CPPC agreement) • End Q3 FY2022-23): Ensure funding and FTEs are in place to implement proposed solution. <p>For Outcome/Result 2:</p>	
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MANAGEMENT RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN (MRAP)

In response to the recommendations of the Report - Audit of Enforcement of Quarantine and COVID-19 Testing Orders
of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada

					<p>PHAC will develop a permanent national compliance and enforcement program under the <i>Quarantine Act</i> to respond to future disease outbreaks that are national or international in scope. As part of this process, PHAC will undertake lessons learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and conduct an environmental scan of comparable programs to determine their applicability in the context of <i>Quarantine Act</i> enforcement. These activities will contribute to the maturity of the existing programs and will support the development of recommendations for the future.</p> <p>Milestones for Outcome/Result 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of Q1 FY 2022-23: Initiate enforcement environmental scan. • End of Q4 FY2022-23: Complete enforcement environmental scan and identify possible <i>Quarantine Act</i> implications. • End of Q1 FY 2023-24: Complete lessons learned review and develop recommendations for permanent national <i>Quarantine Act</i> C&E program, including an assessment on structure, and financial and legislative authorities and impacts. • End Q1 FY2023-24: Secure PHAC Senior Management support and approval for proposed approach. 		
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3. Report 8

- [OAG Recommendation \(#118\) – Systems and Processes around Quarantine](#)

a. Rec #118 – Systems and Processes around Quarantine

Improve its systems and processes for administering nationwide mandatory quarantine and develop emergency plans for administering mandatory quarantine orders.

- PHAC Response: Continue to make improvements, where needed, in areas including methods used to verify and estimate overall compliance with mandatory quarantine regulations.

Key Interim Milestones:

- Document lessons learned and areas for improvement. (FY 21/22 & 22/23)
- Emergency plans for the administration and enforcement of mandatory quarantine orders are developed based on lessons learned (first draft) (April 2022)
- Emergency plans orders are updated, finalized and approved. (April 2023)

Progress to Date:

- Lessons learned are being documented and used in forward planning. A **systematic process** for gathering and documenting lessons learned is under development.
- **Lessons learned** from the significant changes to border measures implemented during 2021 (both to de-scope and surge activities) will form **part of the planning to administer a national quarantine program.**
- Compliance and enforcement program has **begun a strategic planning exercise** for FY2022-23 that will include planning for the administration of a future, nationwide mandatory quarantine program, should one be required.

- **Commissioned a report** from an external contractor (delivered in May 2021) to conduct a programmatic review of the quarantine compliance and enforcement program, including a programmatic and systems gap analysis. This report is **being used to feed into draft emergency plans**.
- **Work has begun on a “Quality Manual”** which will synthesize lessons learned, gap analyses, processes and procedures into an artefact that can be used as the basis for the implementation of a future national quarantine program.

Order Paper Questions of Interest

- [Q-331 - Federal Mandates](#)
- [Q-284 – GBA+ Analysis and DQFs](#)
- [S-67 Quarantine Exemptions \(March 2020 – November\)](#)

a. Q-331 - Federal Mandates

QUESTION

With regard to all federal COVID-19 related mandates and restrictions, and broken down by each measure: (a) what was the scientific justification or study for each mandate or restriction; (b) what is the specific website address where the study's details, including the findings, can be found; (c) on what date will each restriction end; and (d) for each mandate or restriction that does not have a set end-date, what criteria or metric has to be achieved in order for it to be rescinded?

As of February 28, 2022, the in-force Orders in Council (OIC) relating to the COVID-19 are:

- OIC [2022-0177 Minimizing the Risk of Exposure to COVID-19 in Canada Order \(Prohibition of Entry into Canada\)](#)
In force February 28, 2022
Cessation of Effect March 31, 2022
- OIC [2022-0178 Minimizing the Risk of Exposure to COVID-19 in Canada Order \(Quarantine, Isolation and Other Obligations\)](#)
In force February 28, 2022
Cessation of Effect March 31, 2022

(a) SARS-CoV-2 was first detected in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and was a new strain of virus never before seen in humans. SARS-CoV-2 causes the

disease COVID-19 and Canada's first case of the disease was confirmed on January 27, 2020. Originally seen to be a local outbreak, COVID-19 spread rapidly and on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a COVID-19 pandemic. Five days later, Canada had 401 confirmed cases and the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) of Canada stated that COVID-19 posed a serious health risk. COVID-19 has now affected the majority of countries around the world. As of February 17, 2022, 23 months after the WHO declared a Pandemic, the WHO COVID-19 Dashboard was reporting more than 416 million global cases and more than 5.8 million global deaths.

Coronaviruses are spread among humans primarily through the inhalation of infectious respiratory droplets (e.g., when an infected individual coughs or sneezes) and, in some situations, through aerosols, created when an infected person coughs, sneezes, sings, shouts, or talks. Coronaviruses are also spread through contact with objects or surfaces contaminated by infectious droplets. Human-to-human transmission is the main driving force of the current COVID-19 outbreak and is exacerbated by a lack of immunity in the general population. While vaccination is an essential tool to reduce the risk of severe illness, the interplay of waning protection against infection following vaccination and the rise of novel variants of concern (VOCs) result in ongoing transmission risk.

A number of individuals infected with COVID-19 will remain asymptomatic, meaning that they will show little or no symptoms and might therefore be unaware that they are infected. Nonetheless, asymptomatic carriers can transmit COVID-19 to people in their surroundings. It is, therefore, important to diagnose and isolate the asymptomatic cases to ensure they do not unknowingly spread the virus in their community.

Pre-symptomatic carriers, who contracted the disease but might not yet be aware, can also spread the disease. Prior to the Omicron VOC, the median incubation period (time between exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and development of symptoms of COVID-19) is five to six days, but it is estimated that up to 14 days might elapse from the moment an individual is exposed and the appearance of symptoms. The time period in which an individual with COVID-19 can transmit the virus is a maximum of 10 days after symptom

onset for immunocompetent people who have COVID-19. For the Omicron and Delta VOCs, slightly shorter incubation periods have been reported.

Canada saw a 161% increase in the number of travellers arriving from the United States in December 2021 compared to December 2020, and a 289% increase among international travellers arriving from all other countries for the same period, due to the gradual easing of Canada's border restrictions. Evidence demonstrates that higher volumes of travellers result in increased positivity rates, particularly for those travelling from countries with high domestic infection rates. Additional evidence demonstrates that a combination of pre-departure and post-arrival testing will facilitate detection of persons with COVID-19 entering Canada. Identification of cases permits genetic sequencing and the identification of VOCs to support public health efforts to reduce COVID-19 spread.

The Government of Canada has eased border measures for fully vaccinated travellers. This decision was determined based on public health criteria, scientific evidence, and the epidemiological situation in Canada and around the world. The COVID-19 vaccines are effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations and death from COVID-19. Since the start of the vaccination campaign on December 14, 2020, case-level vaccine history data revealed 72.6% of COVID-19 cases aged 5 years or older show that 51.9% of these cases were associated with unvaccinated persons, 7.7% were not yet protected by the vaccine or only partially vaccinated, 34.7% were fully vaccinated and 5.7% were fully vaccinated with an additional dose.

Variants of Concern (VOCs)

The Public Health Agency of Canada, along with other public health organizations around the world, has identified the spread of VOCs in Canada as a major concern. The increased transmissibility of these variants and their partial evasion of immunity from past infection and vaccination had the potential to substantially increase the number of cases in the country, leading to a significant increase in the number of hospitalizations and deaths.

The variant now referred to as Omicron was first reported by South Africa in late November 2021. At the time, it was hypothesized that this variant could be the cause of a significant increase in cases in the South African province of Gauteng. South African scientists noted over 30 spike protein mutations, including in sites known to be associated with cellular attachment (which can increase transmission) and sites associated with antibody binding (which can confer immune evasion). The WHO designated Omicron as a VOC on November 26, 2021. On November 28, 2021, Canada confirmed its first case of the Omicron variant, which was linked to international travel. Of note, the travelers originated from Nigeria, which at that time had not been identified as an at-risk country, demonstrating that the country-agnostic border testing program is capable of identifying variants originating from areas not known to be at risk. The Omicron situation evolved rapidly in Canada and globally, largely due to the significantly increased transmission potential of Omicron compared to previous VOCs. Following establishment of transmission in Canada, a significant Omicron-driven wave was observed.

Since late December 2021, the Omicron VOC has become the predominant variant in Canada. Omicron is characterized by significant genomic changes from previous strains, conferring higher transmissibility, a shorter median incubation period, and greater immune evasion from both vaccines and prior infection. These characteristics contributed to Omicron's growth advantage. Although Omicron is currently dominant, it remains important to consider the large body of evidence about vaccine effectiveness against Delta, because it is possible that future variants may be more similar to previous variants or the ancestral strain used in the vaccine.

(b) Canada's measures are based on review, analysis, and expert opinion on a rapidly increasing and evolving body of scientific evidence related to the virus, its characteristics, its epidemiology, its impacts, emerging variants of concern, the value and impact of public health interventions, and the impact of vaccination and vaccine effectiveness. A number of sources (including sources external to the Government of Canada) provide access and reference to international and domestic pre-print and peer-reviewed research studies and summaries of the evidence, such as:

- [COVID-19 summaries of recent evidence - Canada.ca](#)
- [CanCovid](#)
- [COVID-END](#)
- [McMaster University Health Forum](#)

A number of key reference documents also include:

- [SARS-CoV-2 variants: National definitions, classifications and public health actions - Canada.ca](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak updates, symptoms, prevention, travel, preparation - Canada.ca](#)
- [Mathematical modelling and COVID-19 - Canada.ca](#)
- [COVID-19: Summary data about travellers, testing and compliance - Canada.ca](#)
- [COVID-19 daily epidemiology update - Canada.ca](#)
- [Coronavirus \(who.int\)](#)
- [Update on Omicron \(who.int\)](#)
- [Canada Gazette, Part I, Volume 156, Number 7: ORDERS IN COUNCIL](#)

(c) OICs [2022-0177](#) and [2022-0178](#) are set to expire on March 31, 2022. [The OICs may be renewed or amended as the epidemiological situation at the time dictates.](#)

(d) All of the COVID-19 related OICs have set end dates. In determining whether the OICs are renewed or amended, a variety of factors are considered, such as epidemiological metrics, indicators such as vaccine effectiveness against variants of concern, the international situation, and pressure on domestic health care capacity.

b. Q-284 – GBA+ & DQFs

QUESTION

With regard to the Public Health Agency of Canada's Designated Quarantine Facility (DQF) program: (o) how did PHAC apply a gender-based analysis to the impact of the quarantine program on hotel workers displaced by the program;

(p) if undertaken, what was the conclusion of any gender-based analysis to examine the impact of the quarantine program on hotel workers

(o) Regarding gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) considerations, while the emergency orders issued under section 58 of the *Quarantine Act* are not subject to the *Cabinet Directive on Regulations*, nor the requirement for a GBA+ analysis, PHAC completed a GBA+ analysis to inform the development of border measures.

In submitting funding requests for border operations, GBA+ analyses were completed for the broader border control measures, which includes DQFs. These analyses focus on the impacts on travellers, who are the target population of quarantine measures, rather than on the businesses contracted by PHAC to carry out aspects of the quarantine operations.

(p) While the analysis focuses on the impacts on travelers, who are the target population of quarantine measures, rather than on the businesses contracted by PHAC to perform aspects of the quarantine operations, PHAC was able to assist partnering hotels with the retention of employees in the hotels serving as a DQFs.

For example, the majority of Pacific Gateway Hotel employee layoffs were made between February 20, 2020 and March 20, 2020 due to a rapid decline in tourism at the onset of the pandemic. This is prior to the designation of the hotel as a quarantine facility on March 27, 2020. At that time, PHAC officials met with hotel management and employees to explain how they could safely support aspects of the quarantine operation. Approximately 30% of the staff were retained to continue performing duties at the hotel outside the isolation areas, managing building and perimeter security, meal preparation, and reception/front-desk activities.

c. S-67 Quarantine Exemptions (March 2020 – November 2021)

S-067 - Appendix A

No. 067.

NAME OF ORGANIZATION: Public Health Agency of Canada

1. The total number of exemptions granted: 8								
2. The individual to whom an exemption was granted	3. The dates on which exemptions were granted	4. The name of the Minister who granted the exemption	5. The location in which the individual receiving the exemption entered Canada	6. The reasons for each exemption that has been granted	7. The proposed activities that the individual granted an exemption planned to engage in	8. Whether any restrictions were placed by the Minister or their department on such activities in the context of the exemption granted	9. The nature of follow-up under taken by the Minister or their department to ensure conditions were adhered to	
[Private information redacted] ¹	2020-03-19	Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health	Unknown	Clause 3(g) of the COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease in Canada Order (Prohibition of Entry into Canada) - a person who enters Canada at the invitation of the Minister of Health for the purpose of assisting in the COVID-19 coronavirus disease response	Fulfillment of contract deliverables related to the supply of ventilators.	No. (Exemption applied prior to the implementation of mandatory quarantine)	N/A	
Asymptomatic persons who are a Canadian citizen, permanent resident, temporary resident, protected person or person registered as an Indian under the Indian Act who resides in Canada, and who travelled to a foreign country to: (a) attend to the death of or provide support to an immediate or extended family member who is deemed to be critically ill by a licensed health care practitioner; (b) provide care to an immediate or extended family member who is deemed by a licensed health care practitioner to require support for a medical reason; or (c) attend a funeral or end-of-life ceremony	2021-04-08	Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health	Various ports of entry (land and air)	An exemption from the requirement to quarantine in a GAA existed for persons arriving in Canada for compassionate reasons (i.e. to be present during the final moments of life for a loved one, to provide care to a person, to attend a funeral/end of life ceremony), but not for persons returning to Canada after travelling abroad for compassionate reasons. As such, a limited quarantine exemption was granted for asymptomatic persons returning to Canada after travel abroad for compassionate reasons from the requirement to quarantine at a GAA.	Return home to Canada after travelling abroad for compassionate reasons.	* Provide evidence of a pre-boarding COVID-19 molecular test * Undergo a COVID-19 molecular test when entering and after entering Canada * Quarantine themselves without delay and remain in quarantine until the expiry of the 14-day period that begins on the day on which the person enters Canada * Remain in quarantine until they receive the second test result or for another 14- day period, whichever comes first * Follow any instructions provided by a quarantine officer or the Minister of Health	Compliance was undertaken by CBSA and PHACs compliance and enforcement team to ensure compliance with testing and quarantine requirements.	
Persons evacuating from Afghanistan	2021-08-28 2021-09-20 Extension 2021-11-20 Extension	Jennifer Luftallah, Vice President of PHAC (delegated authority) Brigitte Diogo, Vice President of PHAC (delegated authority) Brigitte Diogo, Vice President of PHAC (delegated authority)	Primarily Toronto Pearson International Airport	Exempt evacuees fleeing Afghanistan from the requirement to follow pre-departure testing requirements prior to boarding an aircraft organized by the Government of Canada. To address the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and support the Government of Canada's commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghan nationals over a two-year period.	Evacuate persons (including Canadians and Afghans) from Afghanistan and resettle in Canada.	* Undergo COVID-19 molecular testing upon arrival, in accordance with the instructions of a quarantine officer or the Minister of Health, and any other COVID-19 molecular testing which may be required under the QIO * Remain in quarantine (or isolation if symptomatic) for 14 days * Follow any instructions provided by a quarantine officer or the Minister of Health	Compliance was undertaken by CBSA and PHAC compliance and enforcement teams to ensure compliance with testing and quarantine requirements.	
Canadian citizens, permanent residents, and foreign nationals who are the immediate and extended family members of Canadian citizens or permanent residents, who are part of a Government of Canada-facilitated evacuation relating to Afghanistan Other foreign nationals who are part of a Government of Canada-facilitated evacuation relating to Afghanistan Crew members who are assisting, or part of, a Government of Canada-facilitated evacuation	2021-09-01 2021-09-20 Extension 2021-11-20 Extension	Jennifer Luftallah, Vice President of PHAC (delegated authority) Brigitte Diogo, Vice President of PHAC (delegated authority) Brigitte Diogo, Vice President of PHAC (delegated authority)	Primarily Toronto Pearson International Airport	Exempt evacuees fleeing Afghanistan from the requirement of electronic submission prior to boarding an aircraft organized by the Government of Canada who are unable to meet the requirement to provide information using electronic means. Air crew were unable to report vaccination information and 14-day travel history due to inadequate ArriveCAN infrastructure to capture the information. The exemption also addressed the imminent and urgent need to evacuate persons from Afghanistan without delay for personal safety concerns	Evacuate persons (incl. Canadians and Afghans) from Afghanistan and resettle them in Canada.	* Provide a quarantine plan, or a completed PHAC Traveller Contract Information Form to PHAC officer when entering Canada * Provide 14 day travel history, or a completed PHAC Traveller Contract Information Form to PHAC officer when entering Canada * Provide information and evidence of vaccination; or a completed PHAC Traveller Contract Information Form to PHAC officer when entering Canada	Compliance was undertaken by CBSA and PHACs compliance and enforcement team to ensure compliance with testing and quarantine requirements.	
Quarantine exempt travellers listed in Schedule 2, Table 1 of the <i>Minimizing the Risk of Exposure to COVID-19 in Canada Order (Quarantine, Isolation and Other Obligations) (QIO)</i>	2021-09-01	Jennifer Luftallah, Vice President of PHAC (delegated authority)	Air and land ports of entry	Exempt all quarantine exempt travellers listed in Schedule 2, Table 1 of the QIO, including essential service providers, from the requirement to submit vaccination status and proof of vaccination by electronic means for the reason of inadequate electronic ArriveCAN infrastructure.	The proposed activities were to complete essential, non-discretionary work.	* Provide vaccination status and proof of vaccination at the time of their first entry into Canada when the ArriveCAN application is enabled to support the provision of this information	N/A	
Person from Botswana seeking urgent medical treatment	2021-12-06	Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health	Toronto Pearson International Airport	Allow person seeking urgent medical treatment, her family and her accompanying medical escort to enter Canada to seek life-saving medical treatment and to resettle in Canada under the Urgent Protection Program (UPP). The UPP is used to enable Canada to respond to requests by referral organizations to provide rapid resettlement for refugees in urgent need of protection.	Receive life-saving medical treatment and resettle within Canada.	* Undergo COVID-19 molecular testing upon arrival * Remain in quarantine (or isolation if symptomatic) for 14 days * Follow any instructions provided by a quarantine officer or the Minister of Health	Compliance was undertaken by CBSA and PHACs compliance and enforcement team to ensure compliance with testing and quarantine requirements.	
Any person arriving in Canada to receive life-saving medical treatment that was in one of the high-risk Omicron specified countries 14 days prior to entering Canada	2021-12-08	Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health	Various air ports of entry	Exemption from the prohibition of entry into Canada for foreign nationals who had been in a high-risk of Omicron specified country 14 days prior to entering Canada, and who must enter Canada to receive life-saving medical services or treatments.	Receive urgent medical services or treatment, accompany or provide urgent medical care to the person travelling to Canada to receive medical services or treatment.	* Follow any instructions provided by a quarantine officer or the Minister of Health.	Compliance with the conditions assessed by Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) agents at the border, with referrals to PHAC quarantine officers, as required.	
Residents of British Columbia	2021-12-20	Brigitte Diogo, Vice President of PHAC (delegated authority)	Land ports of entry between British Columbia and Washington State	Provide flexibility to residents of British Columbia to travel to the United States to access goods and services due to recent flooding and supply chain issues	Travel to the US to access goods and services.	* The exemption allowed BC residents to travel to the U.S. for no more than a 24-hour period and limit non-essential stops. * Follow any instructions provided by a quarantine officer or the Minister of Health.	Compliance with the conditions assessed by Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) agents at the border, with referrals to PHAC quarantine officers, as required.	

¹ Per the Privacy Act and the principles set out in the Access to Information Act, this information has been withheld on the grounds that the information constitutes personal information.