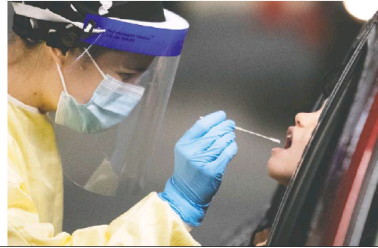




TIMELINE: COVID-19 IN QUEBEC
Remembering a year we'd rather not **A2**



BOOKSTORE IS SAVED
Landlord offers 2-year lease **A6**

TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021

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Be careful letting kids back into sports **A4**

CINEMAS

Finances hurt, but owners are happy to be open **A6**

PHI CENTRE

Assistant must repay \$12.4 million, judge rules **A7**



JOHN MAHONEY

MORE MASKS IN CLASS

Grade 2 student Bianca Rodriguez and her classmates at John Caboto Academy on Monday, the first day it was mandatory for elementary school students from Grades 1 to 4 to wear masks during class. See more COVID-19 coverage inside **A2-A6**

NP

WORLD

Why Meghan and Harry's security was pulled **NP1**



CANADA

MPs hold historic vote using app **NP3**

FP

CANADA

Shopify strikes deal to remove 10,000 tonnes of CO2 **A11**

Barcode with price information: \$1.74 plus taxes at retail \$2.17 beyond metropolitan area \$2.61 Quebec City region

Suburbs warn Montreal budget is unrealistic

Projected revenue is too high, expenses too low, Bourelle says

LINDA GYLAI

The amount that Montreal collects from speeding tickets and parking fines hasn't exceeded \$168 million in any of the last five years, yet Mayor Valérie Plante's administration is budgeting a windfall of over \$195 million from motorist fines and tickets this year even with downtown office towers empty and the COVID-19 curfew still in place.

The optimistic forecast is one of the elements of the 2021 \$6.17-billion municipal operating budget for the city and the island-wide agglomeration that doesn't sit well

for Georges Bourelle, the mayor of the de-merged town of Beaconsfield.

Bourelle qualifies the revenue projection as "simply manipulating" to balance the election-year budget and offer Montreal homeowners a general tax freeze. Elections in all Quebec municipalities are scheduled for Nov. 7.

"We have some very real concerns about the way that the budget was balanced for 2021," Bourelle, the vice-chairperson of the agglomeration council's finance committee, said in an interview. SEE BUDGET ON **A6**

Oprah's Meghan and Harry interview burst Royal bubble



EMILIE NICOLAS

Thus ends the British monarchy. Not because it sits on a decedent amount of wealth looted all over the world during the heyday of colonialism. No. This had somehow managed to be glorified and normalized even by some of the subjects of the Commonwealth who had lost the most from that looting.

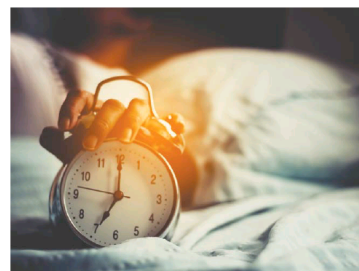
Nationalism and flag-waving is a hell of a drug, and U.K. nationalism is in part built on that pride. The pride to have conquered and taken over control of the resources, culture, land, languages, faith and fate of people all over the world — while never providing even a semblance of equality, let alone equal opportunity.

Because of its political history, British national pride is practically impossible to separate from a sense of British national superiority. And many in the Commonwealth had internalized that over decades of colonial rule. British pride was answered with pride to be part of this big, international, incredibly superior "family of nations" on which the sun never sets. Many of us never quite understood it, really. But as long as that ideological Kool-Aid was drunk, the British monarchy endured.

The British monarchy did not lose its lustre because of genocide conducted here and there against Indigenous peoples of this planet.

Right here in Canada, how many treaties did the Crown sign with the first custodians of this land? And how many were not broken? How many First Nations and Métis and Inuit people have lost their lives in the name of the Queen? SEE NICOLAS ON **A7**

YOU SENIORS Getting enough rest helps us stay active **NP8**



SPORTS MLS CF Montréal promotes Nancy to head coach **NP9**



Grade 2 students, from left, Halley Woo, Emma Lucia, Abigail Rosenberg and Ashlyn Varga Carreiro wear masks in class at John Caboto Academy in the Ahuntsic district of Montreal on Monday. JOHN MAHONEY

BRINGING BACK KIDS' SPORTS SHOULD BE A CAUTIOUS GOAL



ALLISON HANES

Of all the things kids have been missing out on since COVID-19 slammed Quebec, extracurricular activities are a serious, though often overlooked, casualty of pandemic restrictions.

From ballet classes to swimming lessons, everything has been cancelled for much of the past year. And team sports at school have been curtailed since students returned last fall.

The regulations needed to contain the spread of the virus — and keep schools open — have taken an untold toll on children, denying them much-needed motivation to pursue their individual interests, an outlet for their stress and the physical activity needed to keep them healthy. Talented athletes may have lost crucial momentum in their development, putting future scholarships out of reach. And recreational participants have been deprived of the character-building benefits of being part of a team.

These sacrifices may seem inconsequential to some in a life-and-death pandemic. But it's no small matter to young people, especially those who live for their passions and will never get back the opportunities COVID-19 has stolen from them. The impact on kids' well-being, both physical and mental, is incalculable and should not be underestimated.

Nevertheless, as Quebec readies to reintroduce school sports starting next week and protesters ramp up the pressure on the government to allow competitive leagues to resume operations, we must proceed with caution.

The timing is simply worrisome.

Students just returned to class after March break on Monday and many schools are on high alert waiting to see the fallout. There are legitimate fears that a week of relaxation meant relaxed attitudes toward public health measures for some Quebecers. Between travel around the province, police fining scofflaws for illegal private gatherings

and more people out and about, engaging in sanctioned outdoor activities, the risk of increased transmission is real.

With new, more virulent variants of COVID-19, the coming weeks could be critical in determining whether Quebec emerges from the second wave or gets plunged into the throes of a third. Last week, Montreal's public health department warned that many new variant cases were being detected in schools, necessitating a more muscular response to outbreaks.

Quebec's whole plan for keeping children, teachers and support staff safe at school hinges on class bubbles. Great pains are taken by teachers and administrators to keep children, from kindergarten to high school, in their inviolable groups. And new layers of protection are being added, such as disposable procedure masks for all elementary grades, starting Monday.

To be prudent, we should monitor the situation for a couple of weeks to see if there is a rise in cases related to spring break before easing any more rules — like allowing school sports.

But the government isn't waiting before bringing them back. Premier François Legault already promised this incentive to students during a press conference last week. Officials are set to outline the parameters for a return of school sports across the province in the coming days. Although Dr. Horacio Arruda, Quebec's national director of public health, said that extracurricular sports will only take place within class bubbles, Legault said the sports policy will apply to all parts of the province, including the red zone of greater Montreal.

After a year without extra-curriculars, a few more weeks of vigilance would make sense. It would allow the weather to warm up, more Quebecers to get vaccinated and decision-makers to confirm whether the recent decline in new cases is a trend rather than an anomaly. The curve is heading in the right direction — with 579 new cases announced Monday — but after March break, we need to be sure.

Bringing school sports back too quickly risks being counterproductive. The only thing worse for kids than a school year without basketball and cross country

would be having to close schools and resume online learning again.

Quebec should, however, start planning for this eventuality in the near term, as well as the return of organized outdoor competitive and recreational leagues. The baseball and soccer seasons are right around the corner. Indoor activities like gymnastics and karate are a little more complicated, as are contact sports like hockey and football.

But let's start with the easy stuff — tennis, swimming, track and field — and go from there.

Let's gear up to give kids a richer school experience later this spring and a much more normal summer. When the snow melts, it might be the right time to start playing certain sports again. Our kids need and deserve this.

But if we move too fast or too soon, a welcome reprieve risks being turned into a major fumble.

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Advisors say Quebec can give AstraZeneca vaccine to seniors over age 65

MORGAN LOWRIE

Quebec said Monday it will administer the newly approved Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine to seniors, despite Canada's national vaccine expert panel recommending against its use for people over the age of 65.

The province's vaccine expert committee is recommending that all approved vaccines be used immediately to prevent deaths and hospitalizations, the health ministry said in a statement, adding that the AstraZeneca vaccine "provides more flexibility in immunization efforts, especially for priority groups ages 70 to 79."

The newly approved vaccine has numerous advantages, the ministry said — it does not need to be kept frozen and can be used up to 48 hours after a vial is opened. "Its use will also be favoured for (patients) where mobile vaccination is an optimal strategy to reach them — at home, for example."

Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization has said the AstraZeneca vaccine is not recommended for people aged 65 years and over because of insufficient data on its efficacy in older people, despite its approval by Health Canada for adults of all ages.

There are no concerns that the vaccine is unsafe for use, but the NACI panel said the vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna are preferred for people 65 years old and above "due to suggested superior efficacy."

Quebec's immunization committee, however, recommended that in a scenario of limited vaccine availability, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines should be given to the highest priority groups, while AstraZeneca could be offered to those that come slightly lower on the list.

The AstraZeneca vaccine risks being turned into a major fumble, or who would not respond well to any vaccine, including residents in (long-term care) and (private seniors homes), people with immunosuppression and the most exposed health workers," according to the committee's report released Monday.

The report said the overall efficacy rate of the AstraZeneca vaccine was 62.5 per cent. Its efficacy was estimated at 43 per cent for those ages 65 and over, "but very imprecise given the low number of participants in this group." The efficacy seemed "very high," however, in preventing severe illness, hospitalizations and deaths, the report said.

Meanwhile, Quebec on Monday eased COVID-19 restrictions in five regions, permitting residents to return to the gym and restaurant dining rooms for the first time in months. Moving from red to orange alert means the nighttime curfew moved from 8 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. in Quebec City, Chaudière-Appalaches, Estrie, Mauricie and Centre-du-Québec.

François Meunier, vice-president of public affairs for Quebec's restaurant industry group, Association Restauration Québec, said demand appeared strong, with lines forming outside breakfast restaurants in Quebec City Monday morning.

On Monday, Quebec reported 579 new COVID-19 cases and nine more deaths. Hospitalizations declined by two, to 590, while the number of intensive care patients rose by one, to 108.

Health Minister Christian Dubé has said the province will step up the pace of vaccinations this week as more regions join Montreal in opening mass immunization clinics to the general public.

Dubé said Monday Quebec would receive over 213,000 vaccine doses this week, including 113,000 of Oxford-AstraZeneca.

The Canadian Press

Imagine enduring the past year without a home: No sink to wash your hands in, no privacy to self-isolate, no walls to keep you warm if you have COVID-19 symptoms.

Lori Culbert and Josh Aldrich write about the homeless experience.

Tomorrow in the Montreal Gazette

Quebec promises \$23M to help women in business during COVID

The Quebec government on Monday announced it would spend \$23.1 million to provide assistance to female entrepreneurs and workers whose businesses and careers have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The funding, announced by provincial minister for the status of women Isabelle Charest, is aimed at providing help for women from all walks of life.

The plan announced by Charest looks primarily to aid companies owned by women adapt their business plan to the economic realities of the pandemic.

It will also promote job training and improved access to female candidates in the fields of science,

technology and engineering.

The government also plans to ensure its ministries and other organizations are made aware of the economic impacts the pandemic has had on women in order for them to plan how best to address those problems.

Charest said that even though Quebec is considered a model internationally for its efforts to eliminate inequalities between men and women, some of those inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The funding announced Monday is an attempt to ensure gains made by women are not rolled back.

Presse Canadienne