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FRESH AS THE FIRST DAY



DAVE SIDAWAY

Students in the English Montreal School Board returned to class yesterday, among them Lily Anderson, 9, arriving at Parkdale Elementary School in St-Laurent borough. She's greeted by drama teacher Susie Elmaliotis.

Summertime COVID wave more lethal than last year

Contagious strain linked to rise in deaths, hospitalizations in Quebec

AARON DERFEL

Quebec's summer COVID-19 wave has proved to be far deadlier than last year's, defying expectations that the virus that causes it is somehow growing milder, suggest the latest Health Ministry figures.

As the KP3.1.1 variant has become predominant in Quebec, as is the case elsewhere in North America, the province recorded 117 deaths linked to COVID-19 for the month of August (as of Sunday), compared with 88 such fatalities for the whole month last year. In July, there were 109 deaths compared with 46 for the same month in 2023.

Preliminary research has shown that although the KP3.1.1 strain is not more virulent than previous variants, it is more contagious. In Quebec, this is reflected in the fact that the positivity rate among those tested for COVID-19 is now 23.7 per cent, the highest it's been since the winter resurgence of December 2023.

In addition, Quebec declared a total of 322 hospitalizations with and for COVID-19 as of Tuesday, compared with 985 hospitalizations on the corresponding date last year. The province was also battling outbreaks in 159 long-term care centres and hospitals as of Aug. 19 (the most recent date available), in contrast with fewer

than a hundred on the same date last year.

"I think those numbers are concerning," said Dr. Donald Vinh, an infectious diseases specialist at the McGill University Health Centre. "First, SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) is still circulating. Secondly, there clearly remain many people at risk for severe disease."

More Quebecers in their 80s died from COVID-19, followed by those in their 90s, the numbers show. However, the multisystem disease has also killed people in younger age groups, including 34 in their 50s, nine in their 40s and one in their 30s, according to Quebec's public health institute. (Those figures run from Aug. 27 last year to the same date this year.)

"The virus is not becoming more benign," Vinh explained. **SEE COVID ON A4**

We're helping Indigenous students in college: CAQ

MICHELLE LALONDE

Quebec's minister responsible for Indigenous relations says the government plans to set up a working group this fall that will help Indigenous students succeed at CEGEP despite tougher French language requirements.

Minister Ian Lafrenière was responding to news of a petition recently launched by Dawson College's students association that demands all Indigenous CEGEP students be exempted from provisions of the Charter of the French Language added by Bill 96. The petition, which had more than 1,600 signatures as of Thursday afternoon, says the new law "acts as a deterrent for Indigenous students in their pursuit of their post-secondary education." **SEE INDIGENOUS ON A6**

Honorary Chair Rolf Hagen Jr. | FOUNDATION AIR CANADA | CIBC | GENESIS WEST ISLAND | HAGEN | Paula Sapich | 3D Financial Solutions Solutions Financières 3D | 6:30 PM Gen Admission \$75.00

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