

## Coronavirus: Is Canada Doing Enough?

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A couple of months ago, people discussing China were focused on her rise as the world's burgeoning super-power. Over a relatively short period of time, she has grown to be the world's largest exporter of goods and the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest importer. She was known to be building (and presumably still is building) a world-class navy; she was busy creating islands in the South China Sea for new ports for her ships<sup>1</sup> and staging-grounds from which she could project strength and defend her possessions.

In the past few weeks, however, an unknown virus has come crashing onto the world stage, no longer a rumour but now a full-blown shadow of death, no longer lurking in dark places but lunging and striking. When we think of terror in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we tend to think of crafty men plotting cruel and devious deeds. Yet sudden death may strike fear in peaceful hearts without the secret agreements of sinful men.

Throughout history, plagues and pestilences have taken their toll of human lives. Wars have wreaked their havoc and the dead of past wars—both soldiers and civilians—deserve our tears and our solemn reflections. But a plague of epic proportions can swell the lists or make new lists of its own . . . without sharp steel or ballistic force.

In 1918, the Spanish Flu, (some believe it originated in Kansas), travelled on troop ships to foreign lands and it is estimated that 1/3 of the global population was infected. Although only a small percentage of those infected actually died, that small percentage was between 20 and 50 million people.<sup>2</sup>

In Europe, the Black Death (the bubonic plague) ransacked the continent during the mid 1300s. Carried by rats and made more powerful by famine, the Plague struck down families, wasted villages, pulled down leaders and disrupted commerce. It is believed to have killed 75 million to 200 million people worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Terror had its day, even when the concept of a virus or a germ was yet unknown.

As the world now faces the scourge of Coronavirus, we understand much better how disease can be spread and (sometimes) how it can be controlled. But the intricacies of this strain and the steps required to stop its advance are not yet fully known.

Understandably, countries did not immediately take the drastic measures at the beginning that, now in retrospect, could have severely limited the spread of the virus. Some say that Chinese leader Xi Jinping knew about the outbreak in Wuhan at least two weeks before he spoke about it publicly.<sup>4</sup>

The insidious nature of a disease like this is that one doesn't know how serious it is until people have died. One doesn't know until it has been transmitted through several layers of contacts how contagious it might be or what are its modes of transmission. By the time several have died and dozens have been diagnosed, hundreds have been infected.

This particular strain of coronavirus (COVID-19) is characterized by another insidious characteristic: asymptomatic transmission. People can carry the disease and infect others for days before they feel or

exhibit symptoms themselves. That is why travellers to and from Wuhan and Hubei Province have been able—unwittingly—to carry the disease to distant cities where the asymptomatic transmission can begin all over again. In our age of world travel, the contact-chains can result in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> hand transmission from contacts in places seemingly not connected with Wuhan.<sup>5</sup>

Two things worth thinking about in relation to this worldwide health crisis are: Where did it come from? What should be done to limit the damage and stop the spread?

Nearly all agree that COVID-19 first attacked people in Wuhan. The Chinese version is that it began in a meat market. Plausible, but this thesis ignores the massive bio-labs in Wuhan.<sup>6</sup> Created to study viruses, could these facilities have leaked COVID-19? Not impossible. The study of transmissible disease is a field fraught with dangers. The world may be taking a beating from an experiment gone awry.

This is not something to take lightly. China's economy is reeling and will continue to falter as businesses shut down plants and distribution networks, cut travel and cancel conferences. If a little germ can bring the world's economic and manufacturing giant to its knees in a few short weeks, what impact would the spread of this disease have on Canada, already weakened by rail blockages and internal turmoil?

The Prime Minister must put his selfies and UN ambitions on hold and deal with the two great challenges facing Canada today: a) the resolution of the acrimonious disputes over land and resource development, and b) the protection of Canadians from the worst potential disease epidemic in our history. As always, our borders should be protected, not only from terrorists of evil intent but from the terror of a disease for which we are not prepared.

Temperature checks are not enough.<sup>7</sup> We must have short-term isolation and quarantine protocols in place. Travel and imports from high-risk locations must be restricted. The citizens of this country need to know that the PM takes these things seriously. Our future as a nation may depend upon full engagement and transparency.

## **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> [nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/real-problem-chinas-south-china-sea-bases-52907](https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/real-problem-chinas-south-china-sea-bases-52907)

<sup>2</sup> [www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/1918-flu-pandemic](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/1918-flu-pandemic)

<sup>3</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Death](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Death)

<sup>4</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/02/15/world/asia/xi-china-coronavirus.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/15/world/asia/xi-china-coronavirus.html)

<sup>5</sup> [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/coronavirus-bc-update-1.5470757](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/coronavirus-bc-update-1.5470757)

<sup>6</sup> [www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/jan/24/virus-hit-wuhan-has-two-laboratories-linked-chines/](https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/jan/24/virus-hit-wuhan-has-two-laboratories-linked-chines/)

<sup>7</sup> [keyt.com/health/2020/02/20/no-us-coronavirus-cases-were-caught-by-airport-temperature-checks-heres-what-has-worked/](https://keyt.com/health/2020/02/20/no-us-coronavirus-cases-were-caught-by-airport-temperature-checks-heres-what-has-worked/)