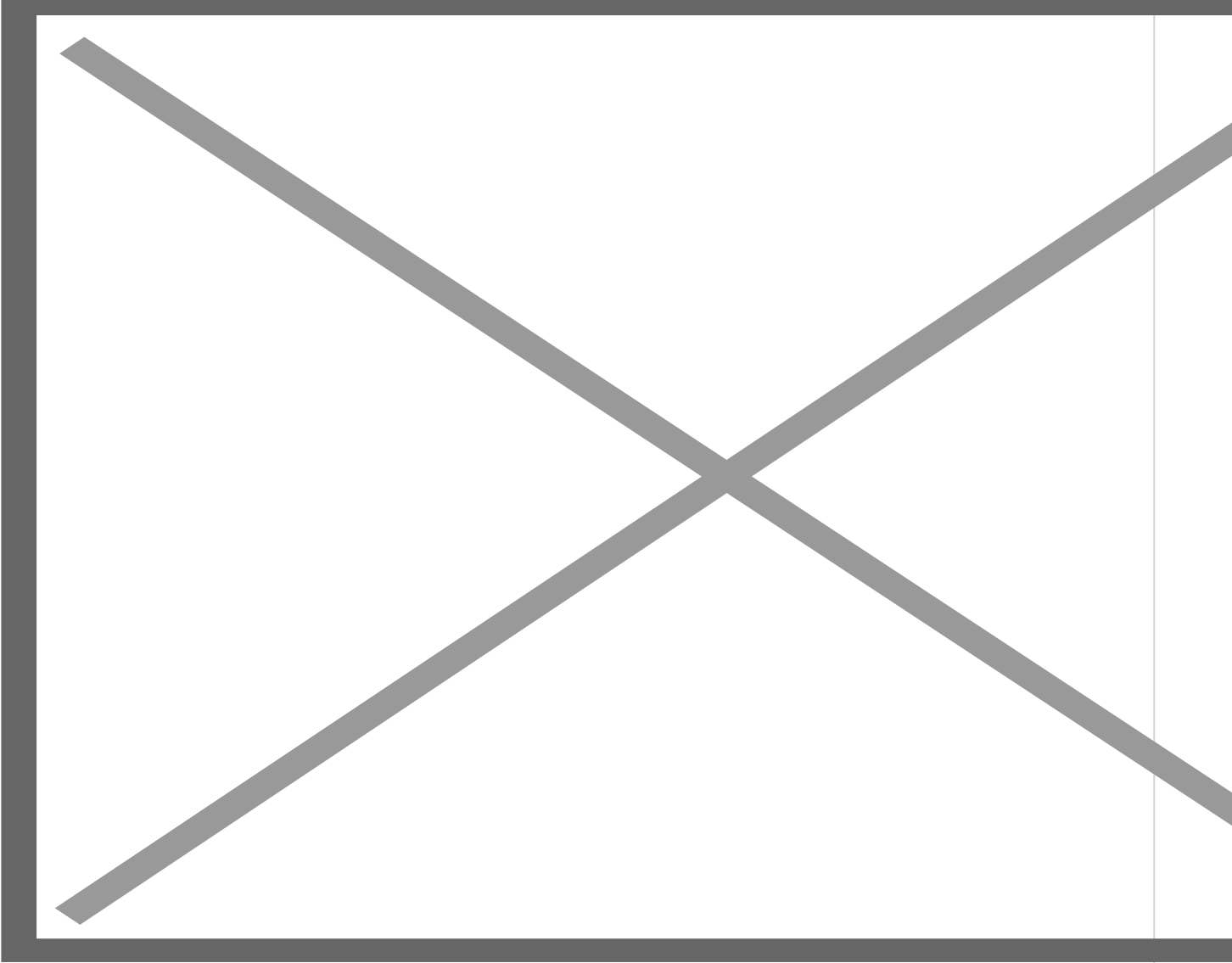


Canada's largest province hits new high of daily COVID infections

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The Ontario government declared a state of emergency last week amid rising coronavirus infections and hospitalisations [File: Carlos Osorio/Reuters]

Ottawa, April 13 (RHC)-- Canada's most populous province has set a new record for single-day coronavirus infections, local media reported, as it struggles to contain a surging third wave of the pandemic and cope with mounting hospitalisations. Ontario reported 4,456 new cases of COVID-19 on Sunday, as well as 21 additional coronavirus-related deaths.

The new figures come just days after Ontario Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency and imposed a stay-at-home order due to rapidly rising infections, spurred in part by more easily transmissible variants of the virus.

An increase in intensive care unit admissions across Ontario has drawn particular concern among healthcare workers and public health experts. As of Sunday morning, 605 COVID-19 patients were in ICUs – up 20 from the previous day.

Dr Michael Warner, medical director of critical care at Michael Garron Hospital in Toronto warned on Saturday that the situation “is going to get much worse.” “On paper, Ontario has about 2,300 ICU beds. In practice, though, we have far fewer because we simply cannot staff them,” Warner said in a video posted on Twitter on Saturday.

He called on the federal government to help coordinate the transfer of healthcare workers, including ICU nurses, from parts of Canada less affected by the pandemic to harder-hit locations, such as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). “We need ICU nurses here in the GTA to care for the patients that are coming and the patients we have already,” he said.

The Ontario government said on Sunday that it would authorize 700 additional pharmacies to administer AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine to people over age 55, as it works to ramp up its vaccination campaign amid the surge in infections.

Earlier, the province issued emergency orders to allow healthcare workers to be redeployed to hospitals needing assistance, and to make it easier for hospitals to transfer patients to other facilities if they reach capacity. Last week, the Hospital for Sick Children, commonly referred to as SickKids, a paediatric care facility in Toronto, also said it would open up eight beds in its ICU for COVID-19 patients aged approximately 40 and under.

“Patient transfers will only occur once certain hospitals in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) exhaust available capacity after activating their surge plans, and all potential transfers to neighbouring regions have been attempted,” the hospital said in a statement.

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