

COVID Version 2.0, Pandemic Management For Dummies

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I recently took the opportunity to read and reflect on my December 2020 musings in this space. As I suspected, memory served me well and I was lamenting the mismanagement of the pandemic at the provincial level and the looming lockdown.

What's so depressing about these recollections is that here we are almost exactly one year later, and with the arrival of Omicron on our doorstep, it appears we've learned virtually nothing over these past, long and difficult months.

Here we go again?but this time we have a guide with my soon-to-be released COVID Version 2.0 ? Pandemic Management For Dummies.

It would seem, outside of the fact that vaccines now widely exist, people are more anxious than ever before. We're anxious for the world to open up fully, yet anxious that the world is opening up too quickly! We are 50 shades of anxious that lockdowns are looming once again. Kingston, currently home to a significant COVID outbreak, has already declared one, while others are anxious that we may not call a lockdown at all.

It's been implied that if we do shutdown, all signs point to it happening after the holidays ? something my mother would have called ?closing the barn door after the horse has already escaped.?

This time last year, public health units were shutting down regions one by one which simply encouraged shoppers to travel out of their own region to complete their holiday shopping elsewhere.

This year it looks as though we're not closing down at all, although many schoolteachers are quietly preparing the kids for online learning in January.

I'm not sure any small business can afford any more time with a shuttered front door, and I know parents don't want their kids kept home, but now we do have tools in place to help manage this next wave - if only we would use them. Right now, no one appears to be taking the new variant seriously and many holiday shoppers are blithely out and about, including the infamous chin-mask wearing ?covidiot? who must be an evolutionary throwback to a time when humans did in fact breathe through their chins.

(Yes, I'm being sarcastic. It appears I'll have to devote a whole chapter of Pandemic for Dummies to ?How To Wear A Mask.?)

We said it back in 2020 and we'll say it again here now: we should close the schools a week early and keep them shut for an additional week after the holiday.

In our new COVID Version 2.0 Pandemic Management for Dummies, we would update that guidance further by adding keep them closed for two weeks after the holidays. COVID, after all, appears to be spreading most rapidly amongst elementary school aged children who are only just now eligible to receive the vaccine but who are fully capable of spreading COVID. Outbreaks on several university campuses are also newsworthy, but not enough to get the attention of Mr. Ford and Minister of Education who will persist in having his picture taken all over the place, and with school children, unmasked.

As of time of writing (Monday), it appears nothing is enough to change the governments thought process related to making more booster shots available to those now eligible, or to lowering the eligibility for those boosters to those 18+ until after the Christmas holiday - at which point much of the damage will have already been done. In 2020, excuses and mistakes might have been avoidable, but perhaps also excusable. We didn't know any better. Now we do. All signs point to the Omicron variant as moving at an alarming rate, infecting outrageous numbers of people and at least one doctor at the science table is suggesting that the perception Omicron is a ?milder? version of the disease is as yet unproven.

In *Pandemic for Dummies*, we would remind both the federal and provincial governments that those on the front lines; the doctors, nurses, epidemiologists etc. have shown time and again they know what they are talking about. Public health guidelines **MUST** be mandated to acknowledge that Covid is airborne. Access to rapid tests should be free just like it is in so many other parts of the world and even in other provinces right here at home. Handing them out to kids at schools like some sort of benevolent Christmas present is too little too late. We **ALL** should have had access to them months ago. If the unvaccinated can access them for free from employers simply for the privilege of showing up for work ? they should be available to everyone with a sniffle who worries about potential spread. Booster shot access should also be wide open. We have them ? let's use them. Oh, and let's actually pay our nurses appropriately for their continued efforts on the front lines by repealing Bill 124. When you know better, you do better. Except perhaps if you are a sitting member of the current conservative government.

If it were mine to publish, the *COVID Version 2.0 Pandemic for Dummies* would include the most obvious step of all: vaccine equity and access for all. Disease knows no geographic boundaries as has been shown in wave after wave of COVID.

By the time a variant is identified, it has already crossed our borders and closing down air travel might slow its progress but not by much. What really needs to happen to finally bring this pandemic to an end is that everyone, everywhere around the world, has access to a series of COVID vaccine shots (including boosters.) Rich nations cannot vaccinate their way out of a pandemic if they do not also help the rest of the world.

Oh, and if you ask ?but what about the cost?? I would simply respond, ?What is the cost to us all, to the entire world, if we get this wrong again??