

## Thirty seconds to lockdown

by SAM ODROWSKI

"This took me about 30-seconds to make a decision," said Doug Ford, on shutting down schools and going into yet another lockdown, this Monday (Jan. 3).

Does he ever stop to think that might be the problem?

Knee jerk reactions to modelling data from "public health experts" that has proven to be incorrect time after time, is how Ontario has ended up in the past as one of the most locked down jurisdictions in North America.

Right now, the apparent experts, who haven't been successful in accurately modelling any past waves of COVID-19, say their projections reveal that hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 cases per day will take hold in Ontario, with 1 in 100 cases resulting in a hospital admission, quickly overwhelming the healthcare system.

But instead of using fancy computer models that shout doom and gloom, why not look at Public Health Ontario's (PHO) actual data and get a more realistic perspective?

A Surveillance Report released less than a week ago by PHO states 0.3 per cent of all Omicron cases result in hospitalization, not 1 in 100 or one per cent, as stated by Ford.

That makes his claim about hospitalizations "used as justification to lock us down" a flat out lie.

Maybe Ford mixed up his data for Omicron with Delta which does have a 1.3 per cent hospitalization rate among those who test positive,

Another fallacy with respect to hospitalizations is the reporting of incidental COVID-19 cases.

It was encouraging to see Dr. Moore last Thursday, finally acknowledge that as many as 50 per cent of all hospitalizations reported in Ontario are from individuals receiving care for something other than COVID-19, such as a broken arm or appendicitis, but happen to test positive.

This is something that many hospital workers have been ringing the alarm bells on since the start of the pandemic, but the idea was often dismissed as misinformation or a conspiracy theory.

Fortunately, the provincial government is now asking for hospitals to separate this information to provide a more accurate picture of the pandemic, which should have been done from the start "better late than never" I suppose.

Dr. Moore says he has more confidence in ICU admissions, since hospitals are only supposed to report admissions from COVID-19 or a related critical illness, but stressed that he's still asking hospitals to review their ICU numbers. This is to make sure they aren't tracking people who are in the ICU for a car accident or other issue that happen to also test positive for the virus.

Right now, the ICUs are in a great spot in Ontario, with just 266 or about 25 per cent of how many people were in ICUs during the last wave's peak.

It's in stark comparison to recent modelling done by Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, which showed that ICUs could be at 75 per cent of their former peak by Dec. 31.

When looking at Ontario's schools, just three days before announcing they're closing for a minimum of two weeks, Dr. Moore said with confidence they would reopen yesterday (Jan. 5) and stay open.

“It is critical to the positive mental health and academic success of our children,” he said, while maintaining that schools should be last to close and first to open.

Dr. Moore noted that he and his colleagues across the province, pediatricians, experts at the Hospital for Sick Children, and the COVID-19 Science Advisory Committee, endorse schools being open.

He also welcomed a recent letter, signed by more than 500 doctors, asking the Ontario government to keep schools open. It cited the “significant harms” caused by prolonged school closures since March 2020.

The letter notes that numerous jurisdictions around the globe are keeping schools open, regardless of case counts, realizing the importance of in-school learning and the little harm COVID-19 poses to children. They also cite the fact that transmission in schools has mirrored what's been happening in the general population and secondary cases are small at about one per cent.

Some of the more significant harms outlined in the letter is disengagement by students, chronic attendance problems, and declines in academic achievement/credit attainment. Admissions to hospitals among youth for eating disorders have increased 55 per cent and psychiatric illness increased by 30 per cent, while urgent mental health visits are up by 20 per cent over the pandemic. Newly diagnosed eating disorders in youth has also almost doubled from 24.5 to 40.6 each month, with hospitalizations nearly tripled from 7.5 to 20 a month. On top of this, school closures worsened food security, resulted in more screen time, and less physical activity for kids.

But all of this information, which the provincial government is fully aware of, didn't stop it from doing a full 180° since Dr. Moore's press conference last Thursday, announcing school closures as well as a new lockdown at the start of the week.

What changed between last Thursday and this Monday?

Next time, let's hope Ford takes more than 30 seconds to make such important decisions that directly impact the livelihood and wellbeing of Ontarians.

These things require significant scrutiny, analysis, and review.

None of which Doug Ford or his government appear to be very good at.