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The ?second wave?

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AS EXPERTS PREDICTED last spring, North America is experiencing a ?second wave? of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the death toll in the United States surpassing a quarter-million and Canada's climbing past 11,000.

At present, management of the pandemic has been left to the United States and the Canadian provinces and territories, but that will likely change with the inauguration of president-elect Joe Biden on January 20, 2021. Unlike current president Donald Trump, Mr. Biden supports the wearing of facemasks and other recommendations of health experts such as social distancing and frequent hand washing.

The good news in the last few days was the success of drug firms Pfizer and Moderna in developing vaccines that tests show are at least 90 per cent effective in defeating the coronavirus. Canada has ordered 414 million doses of the vaccines from 11 companies, but Prime Minister Justin Trudeau indicates the vaccines will not be available here until early next year, since Canada no longer has manufacturing facilities.

In the interim, the main weapon against the virus, apart from wearing masks and staying home without inviting anyone else, are treatments designed to minimize symptoms and reduce the death rate.

In Ontario, the main development this month has been the introduction of color-coding areas of the province according to the seriousness of the situation locally, with Peel Region initially the only red zone but Toronto and the other GTA municipalities going red this week.

As a result, businesses that operate in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph region, such as bars and restaurants, face restrictions and there are lockdowns in Caledon.

Caledon poses an interesting conundrum. The town is affixed to Dufferin County economically and culturally, but in a different health unit, meaning different rules are in place on different sides of Highway 9. The pandemic struck before the Province eliminated the previous government's Local Health Integration Networks, dissolving the 14 LHINs into five regional oversight bodies, and reducing the number of health units from 35 to 10. The Peel Public Health and Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Units were to merge with Waterloo and Halton.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, a Dufferin-Caledon public health unit would have far fewer restrictions than currently are found in Peel. This week, Dufferin had only 12 active COVID cases, only two of them hospitalised, and Headwaters Health Care Centre had just two COVID-19 patients from Caledon (most of Caledon's residents go to hospitals in Brampton and Toronto).

As a result, during the Advent season, which starts Sunday, services at churches in Caledon are limited to 10 persons while churches in Dufferin can legally have up to 50 persons. Similarly, businesses which are closed in Caledon are open in Dufferin, albeit with some restrictions, including face-wearing and social distancing mandates.

It will be interesting to see whether, once the pandemic is over, Ontario Health maintains the WDG health unit with its office in Orangeville or creates a Dufferin-Caledon unit with the same boundaries as the federal and provincial ridings.

If the decision is to maintain the Peel Region Public Health coverage in Caledon, the unit size will be over a million residents compared with the roughly 120,000 residents in Dufferin-Caledon.