

Canada closing borders to non-citizens, Americans exempted

March 16 2020, by Rob Gillies



Minister of Health Patty Hajdu looks on as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks during a news conference in Ottawa, Wednesday March 11, 2020. Canada is announcing \$1 billion (\$730 million) in funding to help health-care workers cope with the increasing number of new cases of coronavirus and to help Canadian workers who are forced to isolate themselves. (Adrian Wyld/The Canadian Press via AP)

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Monday he will close the country's borders to anyone not a citizen, an American or a permanent resident—and even they have to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival—due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Let me be clear: If you are abroad, now is the time to come home," the prime minister said. "If you've just arrived, you must self-isolate for 14 days."

He also said those already in the country, "as much as possible should stay home." He spoke outside his residence, where is self isolating after his wife tested positive for the virus.

Trudeau said the exemption for Americans, despite the rapid rise of cases in the U.S., was due to "the level of integration of our two economies." The U.S. accounts for 75 percent of the country's exports.

"Canada and the United States have the longest un-militarized border in the world and that border is vital to the daily life to people on both side that live of that border," said Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland.

But she noted American tourists are not likely to visit anyway because they will have to self isolate.

"I don't consider that something that a tourist would like to do for a holiday," she said.

Ontario's chief medical officer of health, Dr. David Williams, meanwhile, recommended that all bars and restaurants close, other than those doing take-out and delivery. Ontario, Canada's most populous province had already ordered all public schools closed for two weeks after March break.

Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, said the damage to both the U.S. and Canada would be immense if they shut their borders to each other.

"Much more so than shutting the border to people from other states. It is the only land border that Canada shares with another country. So much of Canada's food supply comes from or via the U.S.," Wiseman said.

"Their economies are so integrated that they would collapse and in quite short order if their common border were to be closed completely. However, Canada has more of a stake in keeping the border open than does the U.S.

The government is restricting overseas flights to just four airports in Toronto, Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver, and mandating airlines to screen passengers for symptoms of the virus before allowing anyone to board a plane.

The number of confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus in Canada more than doubled since Friday, including 32 new confirmed cases in Ontario on Monday.

Trudeau said "we can still slow the spread of this virus" but it will take a major adjustment from everyone.

Officials in the Pacific Coast province of British Columbia also announced three more deaths, all of them stemming from a long-term care home in North Vancouver where the first death in Canada was reported. Canada has more than 400 confirmed cases and now four deaths.

Trudeau's wife, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, tested positive after returning from London. She attended the same event as British actor Idris Elba,

who announced Monday he has also tested positive for the virus. She posed for pictures with him.

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Citation: Canada closing borders to non-citizens, Americans exempted (2020, March 16) retrieved 17 March 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-canada-border-canadians-americans-trudeau.html>

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