

Canada must be vigilant on virus 'for a year', says PM

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Canadians must be vigilant for at least a year, the time it may take for a coronavirus vaccine to become available, Justin Trudeau warned Thursday, as his government projected the disease could kill 11,000-22,000 people there.

"The path we take is up to us," the Canadian prime minister said at his daily press conference, shortly after the release of the first national projections on the evolution of the [pandemic](#) in Canada.

He said it will not be possible to return to normalcy until a vaccine is available, which he said could take between 12-18 months.

The most likely scenarios anticipate between 11,000 and 22,000 deaths if the strict social distancing measures currently in place are respected, compared to just over 500 deaths to date.

If the measures are relaxed, the [death](#) toll could rise to as many as 44,000.

"The initial peak, the top of the curve, may be in late spring with the end of the first wave in the

summer," Trudeau said, hoping for the beginning of a recovery in economic activity and an easing of containment measures by that time.

"There will likely be smaller outbreaks for a number of months after that. This will be the new normal. Until a vaccine is developed," he said.

As a result, "we will have to be vigilant for a year," he stated outside his official residence, looking grave as a snow shower fell on Ottawa.

For days now Trudeau has been under pressure to release nationwide figures on Canada's experience with the pandemic sweeping the globe.

The four most affected provinces, which account for 94 percent of the country's cases, have done so.

The federal government projections said the country could see between 934,000 and 1.9 million cases of COVID-19 by the time the pandemic ends, assuming Canadians observe strict social distancing and other safety measures over the next few months.

As of Thursday morning, Canada was reporting nearly 20,000 cases of infection with 476 deaths, according to figures provided by provincial authorities.

By April 16, the virus [death toll](#) will probably be between 500 and 700, said Chief Public Health Officer Theresa Tam.

"We can't prevent every death, but we must prevent every death that we can," Tam said.

"Models are not crystal balls and we cannot predict the future with them. However, they do help us to plan and they tell us that our collective actions can have a direct and significant impact on the epidemic trajectory."

The number of cases in Canada is doubling every three to five days.

Officials in Quebec, Canada's hardest hit province with nearly half of the country's cases, said the pandemic might peak there in mid-April.

The economic cost is already being felt. Canada's unemployment rate shot up to 7.8 percent last month, its biggest monthly increase in more than 40 years.

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