



**COVID-19 IMMUNITY
TASK FORCE**

Research Roundup

Your weekly review on COVID-related research



Spotlight on CITF-funded Research

Poorer neighbourhoods and racialized communities continue to lag behind in vaccine coverage: latest Canadian Blood Services results

The gap between the rates of COVID-19 infection and vaccination among racialized and non-racialized Canadians continues to exist, as does the gap between Canadians from lower- and higher-income neighbourhoods. The CITF-funded Canadian Blood Services serosurveillance study has released its latest report for the month of May 2021. While the latest data show that the proportion of blood donors with antibodies acquired through vaccination increased substantially in May 2021 (60%) compared to April 2021 (24%), this increase is less pronounced among donors from racialized and lower-income communities. Indeed, these same socioeconomic determinants were also associated with higher rates of antibodies due to infection with SARS-CoV-2.

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A finger prick to test for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies

A team of Vancouver investigators, led by Dr. Agatha Jassem of the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) and partially funded by the CITF, assessed SARS-CoV-2 serological testing using two methods: finger pricking (Dried Blood Spots (DBS)) and traditional venipuncture (blood draw with a needle). Their observations, in pre-print and therefore not yet peer reviewed, conclude that samples obtained with a finger prick are a valid alternative to traditional venipuncture to reliably detect SARS-CoV-2 antibodies.

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Publications from our Experts

Social inequalities at the center of COVID-19 hotspots in Canada

COVID-19 has not affected all Canadian communities equally. A growing body of literature is highlighting the inequalities in communities with high rates of COVID-19. In a recent pre-print, therefore not yet peer reviewed, researchers from across Canada, including CITF Scientific Lead for Data Management and Analysis Dr. David Buckeridge and CITF-funded researcher Tyler Williamson, have explored the geographical distribution of cases by area-level social determinants of health across 16 metropolitan areas in four Canadian provinces.

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Study of blood donors shows many asymptomatic infections during the first COVID-19 wave in Quebec

A study led by Héma-Québec, the provincial blood collection agency, supported by the CITF and featuring CITF-funded researcher Dr. Andrés

Finzi, showed that 2.23% of blood donors were seropositive for SARS-CoV-2 between May 25 and July 9, 2020: about four times higher than the number of PCR-confirmed COVID-19 cases during the same period. In addition, questionnaire data revealed that approximately 50-66% of those who were seropositive were asymptomatic.

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International Research Review

Breakthrough infections with the Delta variant in vaccinated individuals may be associated with lower levels of neutralizing antibodies.

Emergence of variants of concern (VOCs) may potentially impact efforts to end the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the ongoing continuation of the global vaccine rollout. Here, we summarize multiple published and pre-print articles which report increasing prevalence of breakthrough infections in individuals vaccinated with Pfizer or Moderna's mRNA vaccines. VOCs such as the Alpha and Delta variants represent the prevailing cause of these breakthrough infections. Nevertheless, collectively, these reports strongly indicate that vaccination remains a highly effective public health strategy in mitigating the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

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Meeting the need for long COVID policies – call for action

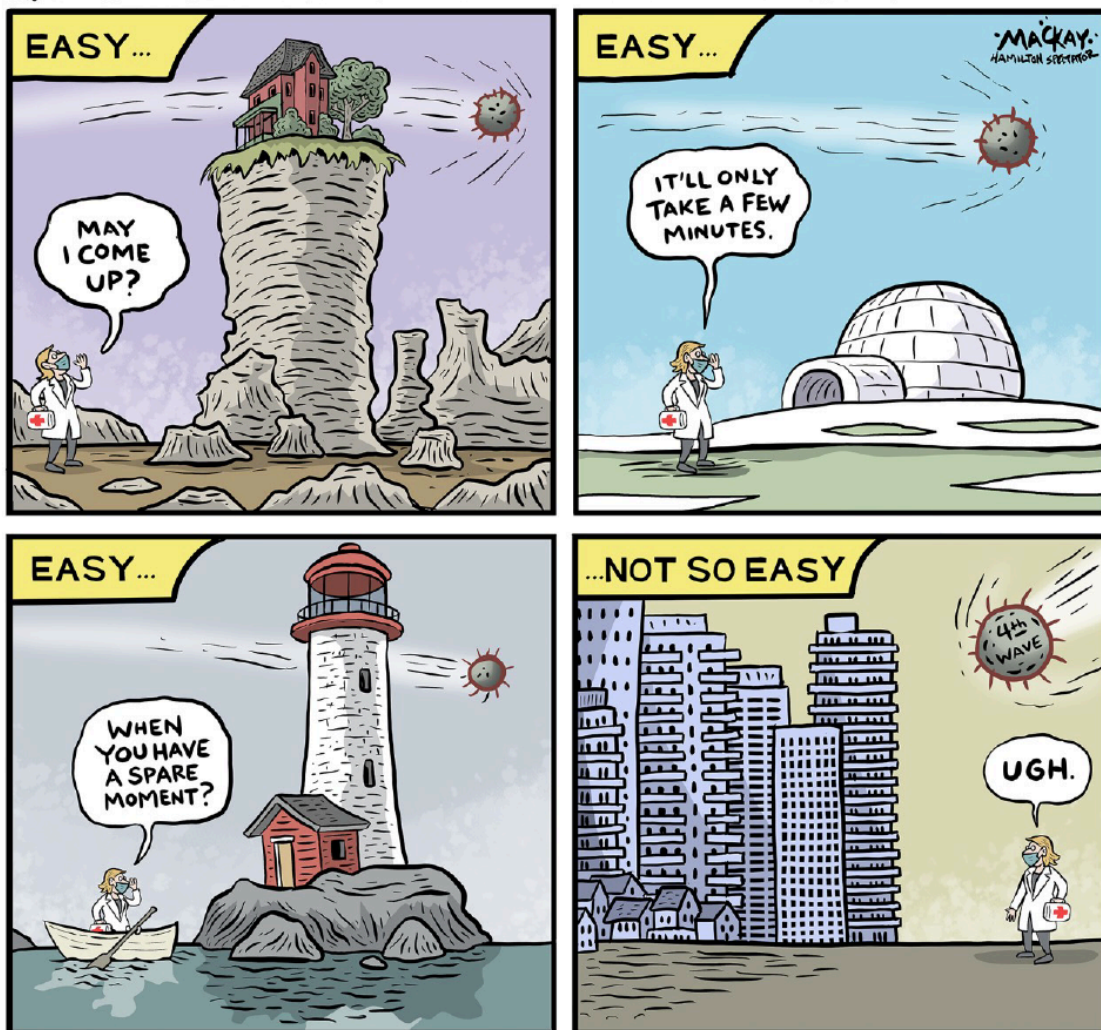
According to a recent viewpoint article in *Science*, around one in three people with symptomatic COVID-19 still experience symptoms 12 weeks after the onset of infection, an outcome known as post-COVID conditions or long COVID. While the mechanisms at play and risk factors of long COVID

are not yet well understood, policy responses need to take into account the complexity of long COVID. In addition, the public health response to COVID-19 needs to adequately address the long-term effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection in the context of the ongoing endemic. Strategies must be formulated to provide integrated care to those suffering from this chronic long-term illness.

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Beating the pandemic blues

22% OF CANADIANS ELIGIBLE TO BE VACCINATED STILL HAVEN'T HAD THEIR FIRST DOSE - THE TASK AHEAD:



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