THE QUESTION ALL PARENTS ARE WAITING FOR AN ANSWER TO A FULL REOPEN SCHEDULED AFTER THE WINTER BREAK, WITH MOST KIDS SLATED TO RETURN MONDAY. THE PREMIER SAYS TO EXPECT AN ANNOUNCEMENT IN DAYS.

POSITIVE BUT STILL WORKING. QUEBEC MAKES AN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE ALLOWING HEALTH CARE WORKERS WHO TEST POSITIVE STAY ON THE JOB.

GOOD AFTERNOON. THERE ARE ONLY A FEW DAYS LEFT IN THE WINTER BREAK AND STUDENTS AND PARENTS IN ONTARIO STILL DO NOT KNOW IF SCHOOL WILL RETURN IN PERSON NEXT WEEK. PREMIER DOUG FORD TOLD REPORTERS IN MISSISSAUGA THAT CABINET WILL MEET SOON TO DETERMINE IF SCHOOLS ARE REOPENING.

I KNOW THE MINISTER HAS BEEN SITTING DOWN AT THE TABLE ALONG WITH THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, THE MINISTER OF HEALTH HAS AND THEY WILL BE HAVING AN ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF DAYS, BUT WE JUST WANT TO SEE HOW THINGS GO AND OBVIOUSLY SPEAK TO THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH, DR. MOORE.

Patricia: BOTH PUBLIC BOARDS ARE SET TO RESTART JANUARY 3, BUT MANY DISTRIBUTED ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND INSTRUCTED THEM TO BRING THEIR BELONGINGS HOME IN ANTICIPATION OF A POSSIBLE SHUT DOWN. THERE ARE CURRENTLY OUTBREAKS AT 30 SCHOOLS IN OTTAWA.

IN QUEBEC AN UNPRECEDENTED DECISION TO KEEP STAFF ON THE FRONT LINES AMID A MASSIVE SURGE. THERE ARE A RECORD-BREAKING 13,149 NEW CASES TODAY. AS CTV'S VANESSA LEE REPORTS,
SOME HEALTH CARE WORKERS TESTING POSITIVE FOR THE VIRUS ARE BEING ASKED TO CONTINUE WORKING.
>> Reporter: THE CRISIS UNFOLDING IN QUEBEC HOSPITALS IS CRITICAL.
MORE PEOPLE ARE GETTING SICK WITH FEWER STAFF TO CARE FOR THEM.
THE GOVERNMENT IS EXPECTING COVID TO SIDELINE AS MANY AS 10,000 HEALTH WORKERS IN THE COMING DAYS BECAUSE OF POSITIVE TESTS OR EXPOSURE TO THE VIRUS.
>> WE HAVE NO CHOICE.
>> Reporter: AND IS RESORTING TO DRASTIC MEASURES.
>> UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS, POSITIVE STAFF WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE WORKING.
>> Reporter: HEALTH OFFICIALS SAY DECISIONS WILL BE MADE ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS.
FOR EXAMPLE, INFECTED HEALTH WORKERS COULD BE ASSIGNED TO WORK WITH COVID PATIENTS.
THEY'LL BE GIVEN EXTRA PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO EAT WITH COLLEAGUES WHO TEST NEGATIVE.
>> WE'RE SEEING THAT THIS IS A BEST ALTERNATIVE COMPARED TO NOT PROVIDING CARE.
>> Reporter: UNIONS REPRESENTING HEALTH CARE WORKERS ARE BLASTING THE MOVE.
THEY SAY RATHER THAN PUTTING STAFF AND PATIENTS AT RISK, THE FOCUS SHOULD BE ON BETTER TESTING AND IMPROVED VENTILATION.
THOSE ON THE FRONT LINES ALSO WANT TO SEE CONCRETE DATA TO ENSURE IT IS SAFE FOR INFECTED COLLEAGUES TO RETURN.
>> IF THERE ARE CLEAR GUIDELINES THAT PEOPLE THAT DON'T HAVE SYMPTOMS THAT ARE WILLING TO COME BACK, THEN MAYBE OF COURSE. WE DON'T WANT TO BE SIDELINED.
>> Vanessa: STAFFING IS ALSO A CONCERN IN SENIORS' HOMES, CURRENTLY STRUGGLING WITH 800 INFECTIONS. TWO PEOPLE HAVE DIED AT THIS LONG-TERM CARE HOME ON MONTREAL SOUTH SHORE WHERE MORE THAN HALF OF RESIDENTS HAVE TESTED POSITIVE, ALONG WITH 31 WORKERS. TO CATCH COVID ITSELF IS NOT NECESSARILY THE TRAGEDY. THE TRAGEDY WOULD BE TO NOT HAVE THE CARE THAT IS APPROPRIATE. >> Vanessa: QUEBEC SAYS IT WILL ALLOW STAFF FROM OTHER ESSENTIAL FIELDS TO CONTINUE WORKING EVEN IF THEY TEST POSITIVE. DETAILS WILL BE RELEASED IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. VANESSA LEE, CTV NEWS, MONTREAL. >> Patricia: JOINING US IS PAUL ROUMELIOTIS. THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE ONCE AGAIN TALKING ABOUT SCHOOLS. WE HOPED TO AVOID THIS CONVERSATION, BUT THERE ARE SOME DOCTORS CALLING FOR SCHOOLS TO STAY CLOSED TO IN-PERSON LEARNING. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN? >> IT IS A DIFFICULT CALL, PATRICIA. I WANT SCHOOLS TO KEEP OPEN, BUT WE'RE LOOKING AT THE NUMBERS. ONTARIO HAD OVER 10,000 CASES. THERE ARE MANY CASES AMONG SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN IN MY AREA OF OTTAWA AND ACROSS ONTARIO. IT IS A TOUGH CALL. I WOULD HAVE SCHOOLS AS THE LAST THINGS TO CLOSE. I WOULD BE LOOKING AT OTHER THINGS AND RESTRICTIONS FIRST AND I BELIEVE MY COLLEAGUES WOULD AGREE WITH THAT. IT'S GOING TO COME TO A POINT TO MAKE THAT DECISION AND IT'S A TOUGH DECISION TO MAKE, I HAVE TO TELL YOU.
IT IS TOUGH BECAUSE THERE ARE EFFORTS TO MAKE CLASSROOMS SAFER THAT IT'S SAFER TO HAVE KIDS IN A CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT RATHER THAN AT HOME DOING VIRTUAL SCHOOL AND NEEDING TO BE WITH THEIR FRIENDS AND DO AFTER SCHOOL.

IS THERE MORE THAT CAN BE DONE THAT MAKE THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT SAFER AND GET KIDS BACK INTO THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT?

CERTAINLY THEY ARE PROVIDING MORE MASKS TO TEACHERS, OBVIOUSLY. THEY'RE GOING TO GET N95s, THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT THAT. THEY'RE LOOKING AT IMPROVING THE VENTILATION, LOOKING AT RATIOS AND COHORTING CHILDREN AND PRECAUTIONS LIKE THAT. THOSE ARE THE THINGS WE NEED TO LOOK AT TO MAXIMIZE BEFORE MAKING THE DECISION TO CLOSE THEM DOWN.

THE OTHER THING IS THE OPERATIONAL ISSUE. IF YOU HAVE NOT ONLY STUDENTS BUT TEACHERS OFF TO THE POINT YOU CAN'T OPERATE, THAT'S ANOTHER ISSUE THAT IS CUMBERSOME IF THEY'RE LEFT OPEN. MY BOTTOM LINE IS, YES, I WISH THEY COULD STAY OPEN, BUT WE'RE LOOKING AT THE NUMBERS AND WAITING FOR A DECISION.

THAT OPERATIONAL ISSUE IS SOMETHING THEY'RE DEALING WITH IN QUEBEC WHEN IT COMES TO HEALTH CARE, THIS UNPRECEDENTED MOVE TO ALLOW HEALTH CARE WORKERS TO CONTINUE TO WORK BECAUSE THEIR STAFFING IS AT A CRISIS POINT. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT, IS THAT SOMETHING THEY REALLY HAD TO GO TO AT THIS POINT?

ONE OF THE THINGS WE ALSO HAVE TO LOOK AT IN TERMS OF THE
NUMBERS, YES, I.C.U. AND HOSPITALIZATIONS.
WE'RE ALSO LOOKING AT THE NUMBER INFECTED.
A CERTAIN PERCENTAGE WILL BE CRITICAL OR ESSENTIAL WORKERS, INCLUDING HOSPITAL STAFF, BUT ALSO OTHER CRITICAL CARE WORKERS IN THE COMMUNITY.
I THINK THIS IS THE LAST STRAW, LAST THING AND CHOICE THAT THEY HAVE.
AGAIN, THERE ARE CAVEATS THERE, PATRICIA.
WE'RE LOOKING AT TEST TO WORK.
IF YOU'RE AN ASYMPTOMATIC CONTACT, FOR EXAMPLE, YOU CAN GO TO WORK IF WE TEST YOU REGULARLY.
NOW IF YOU'RE POSITIVE BUT COMPLETELY ASYMPTOMATIC, THEN WITH CERTAIN PRECAUTIONS IN PLAY, THAT WILL BE ANOTHER OPTION TO BE ABLE TO LOOK AT HOW YOU CAN SAVE THAT WORKFORCE, BOTH IN THE HOSPITAL AND I.C.U. SETTINGS, WHICH IS SOMETHING WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT.
I'M EQUALLY WORRIED ABOUT MANPOWER, OUR HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY IN THOSE ESSENTIAL SERVICES JUST AS I AM IN OUR I.C.U. CAPACITY AS WELL.
WE NEED TO LOOK AT THAT.
IN THE UNITED STATES WHAT THEY'VE ALSO DONE AND WE'RE LOOKING AT SOME DECISION IN CANADA AS WELL TO DECREASE THE ISOLATION PERIOD, THEY'VE DECREASED IT TO FIVE DAYS IN THE UNITED STATES.
THAT WILL, AGAIN, MAKE IT MORE EASY TO -- LESS LONG ISOLATION, YOU CAN -- AND PEOPLE WHO ARE VACCINATED -- TRIPLE VACCINATED IN THE UNITED STATES RIGHT NOW, IF THEY'RE HIGH-RISK CONTACTS, THEY DON'T HAVE TO ISOLATE.
THEY CAN GO TO WORK, AGAIN WITH PRECAUTIONS IN PLACE.
ALL OF THIS IN PLACE, THIS IS A DIFFERENT FRAMEWORK, PATRICIA, WE'RE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD.
THIS IS WHEN WE HAVE A LOT OF CASES, ALBEIT MOST ARE MILD, BUT CAN POTENTIALLY DISRUPTED OUR VERY IMPORTANT INFRASTRUCTURE AND WE NEED TO REACT ACCORDINGLY.
>> Patricia: EXPLORING ALL THE OPTIONS TO NAVIGATE THE NEXT FEW WEEKS AND GET PAST THE PEAK. DR. PAUL ROUMELIOTIS, THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME, APPRECIATE IT.
>> NO PROBLEM.
>> Patricia: THE FORD GOVERNMENT IS ADDING NEW RESTRICTIONS ON LONG-TERM CARE HOMES.
>> ALL GENERAL VISITS TO LONG-TERM CARE HOMES WILL BE PAUSED UNLESS VISITING A RESIDENT IN A PALLIATIVE SITUATION. AS WELL, SOCIAL VISITS FROM HOME WILL BE PAUSED.
ALL RESIDENTS, REGARDLESS OF VACCINATION STATUS, CAN CONTINUE TO LEAVE THE HOME FOR ESSENTIAL REASONS LIKE MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS.
RECOGNIZING THE CRITICAL ROLE THAT DESIGNATED CAREGIVERS PLAY IN THE LIVES OF RESIDENTS, EACH RESIDENTS WILL BE ALLOWED TO DESIGNATE TWO CAREGIVERS WHO MAY VISIT THEM.
>> Patricia: ROD PHILIPS IS PAUSING THE VISITS. THERE ARE CURRENTLY FIVE OUTBREAKS AT LONG-TERM CARE HOMES IN OTTAWA.
THE OTTAWA PARAMEDIC SERVICE IS REPORTING EIGHT NEW INFECTIONS FOLLOWING AN OUTBREAK.
THERE WAS AN OFF-DUTY GATHERING ON DECEMBER 16.
61 EMPLOYEES HAVE CLEARED PROTOCOLS AND ARE BACK ON THE JOB.
>>> IF YOU HAVE AN UPCOMING
APPOINTMENT AT THE SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY CENTRE, THE CLINIC ANNOUNCING IT WILL BE CLOSED UNTIL JANUARY 7 DUE TO STAFFING SHORTAGES.
IF YOU HAVE AN APPOINTMENT, SOMEONE FROM THE CLINIC WILL CALL YOU TO RESCHEDULE.
WE'LL HAVE MORE DETAILS AT 5:00 AND 6:00 TONIGHT AS WELL AS ONLINE.
THE NUMBERS MAY NOT BE AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF COVID-19 IN THE COMMUNITY DUE TO THE LACK OF TESTING.
THERE ARE CURRENTLY JUST EIGHT PATIENTS IN HOSPITAL, ONE IN THE I.C.U.
THERE ARE 653 NEW INFECTIONS, 5,637 ACTIVE CASES IN THE CITY. AND IN THE PROVINCE, THREE NEW COVID-19 DEATHS TO REPORT.
THERE ARE CURRENTLY 726 PEOPLE IN HOSPITAL.
THAT'S AN INCREASE OF 235 PATIENTS SINCE YESTERDAY.
THE PROVINCE BREAKING ANOTHER DAILY CASE COUNT RECORD TODAY, 10,436 NEW INFECTIONS, BUT