

# Daily Update – 1 April 2021

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## Ontario imposes province-wide 'emergency brake'

The Ontario government is imposing a province-wide "emergency brake" starting Saturday, but stopped short of a stay-at-home order, [despite modelling showing](#) such a measure could significantly curb the surge in COVID-19 case numbers and hospitalizations.

The measure comes into effect as of 12:01 a.m. on April 3, the province said in a news release, and will be in place for at least four weeks.

"We are facing a serious situation and drastic measures are required to contain the rapid spread of the virus, especially the new variants of concern," Ford said in a statement.

"I know pulling the emergency brake will be difficult on many people across the province, but we must try and prevent more people from getting infected and overwhelming our hospitals. Our vaccine rollout is steadily increasing, and I encourage everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated. That is our best protection against this deadly virus."

Restrictions will include:

- Prohibiting indoor organized public events and social gatherings, and limiting the capacity for outdoor gatherings to a five-person maximum — except for gatherings with members of the same household or gatherings of members of one household and one other person from another household who lives alone.
- Limits on in-person shopping, including a 50 per cent capacity limit for supermarkets, grocery stores, convenience stores, indoor farmers' markets, other stores that primarily sell food and pharmacies, and a 25 per cent limit for all other retail including big box stores.
- No personal care services.
- No indoor and outdoor dining. Take out, delivery and drive thru options are still allowed.
- Prohibiting the use of facilities for indoor or outdoor sports and recreational fitness with very limited exceptions
- The closure of day camps
- Limiting capacity at weddings, funerals, and religious services to 15 per cent occupancy per room indoors, and to the number of people who can maintain two metres of physical distance outdoors. This does not include social gatherings associated with these services such as receptions, which are not permitted indoors and are limited to five people outdoors.

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## Quebec City, Lévis, Gatineau head back into lockdown

Quebec Premier François Legault says Quebec City, Lévis and Gatineau will be essentially shut down for 10 days starting Thursday at 8 p.m. ET to curb the "exponential" rise of COVID-19 cases in these three cities. Schools will be closed, and students will move to full-time online learning in those three cities.

Gyms, theatres, hairdressers and other non-essential businesses are also shutting down in the three cities, Legault said on Wednesday. Religious gatherings will be limited to 25 people, and there will also be an 8 p.m.–5 a.m. curfew until at least April 12.

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## B.C. guarantees job-protected leave for workers getting COVID-19 vaccines

An update to B.C.'s Employment Standards Act allows part- and full-time employees to take job protected leave from work to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Workers are also allowed to take a dependent family member to receive the vaccine, under the province's regulatory improvements, the B.C. government announced Thursday.

The regulatory change also includes expanding the job-protected leave for reasons related to COVID-19, which were brought in last March — aligning with federal government sickness and caregiver benefits. A worker can now take job-protected leave if they need to care for other family members because of COVID-19, and not only a child or dependent adult as previously defined.

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## Federal Government Increases Alcohol Excise Tax today

In 2017, the federal government introduced a measure that will further increase taxes on Canadians on beer, wine and spirits every single year. This escalator tax increases the excise duty rate on alcohol every April 1.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is leading a campaign to Freeze the Alcohol Tax increase and reverse today's automatic increasing in the upcoming April 19 budget.

<https://www.freezealcoholtax.ca/>

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## B.C. tax changes affecting sugary drinks, Netflix, vaping products come into effect April 1

Tax changes targeting sugary drinks and e-commerce services based outside of B.C. will come into effect on April 1 after being delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The B.C. government says the changes include the elimination of the provincial sales tax exemption for carbonated beverages that contain sugar, natural sweeteners or artificial sweeteners. The tax will apply to all beverages dispensed through soda fountains or similar equipment, along with all beverages dispensed through vending machines.

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## Changes to Alberta's Workers' Compensation Board coverage take effect today

Major changes to the Workers' Compensation Board take effect in Alberta today, including the elimination of an employer's legal obligation to rehire and accommodate an injured worker.

Through Bill 47, the Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, the Alberta government making changes to the workers' compensation and occupational health and safety rules implemented by the previous NDP government.

Some of the WCB changes took effect Jan. 1 but many of the major, and more controversial, changes take effect today.

In addition to eliminating the obligation to reinstate an injured worker after they have been through the WCB process, the changes include:

- Ending an employer's obligation to continue paying for extended health-care benefits to injured workers on WCB. This means an injured worker would have to buy a private insurance plan to maintain health-care coverage not covered by the WCB.
- Closing the Fair Practices Office which effectively served as an ombudsperson's office for the WCB that helped both employees and employers navigate the system.
- Redistributing the surplus from WCB investments to employers in the form of a rebate.
- Removing benefit of the doubt provisions that favoured workers where there is approximately equal evidence, such as in a matter before a WCB medical panel.

When Bill 47 was introduced, Labour and Immigration Minister Jason Copping said it would restore balance to the WCB system and help manage costs by eliminating red tape and duplication of services.

Organized labour is opposed to these changes.

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## Manitoba to eliminate PST on personal services, phase out education property taxes as part of 2021 budget

This year's Manitoba provincial budget will remove the PST on personal care services, such as haircuts and salon services, and begin to phase out education property taxes, Premier Brian Pallister said Thursday.

The PST on personal services will be removed later this year, Pallister said, following through on a promise his Progressive Conservative party [made during the 2019 provincial election campaign](#).

[The promise to eliminate provincial education taxes](#) from annual property tax bills was also made ahead of that election, and was reiterated in the 2020 throne speech.

The provincial government will release its 2021 budget on Wednesday April 7.

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## Minimum wage increases in PEI, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia come into effect

The minimum hourly wage on P.E.I. rose 15 cents on Thursday to reach \$13.

The minimum wage in Nova Scotia rose 40 cents on Thursday, to \$12.95.

The minimum wage in New Brunswick rose 5 cents on Thursday to \$11.75.

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## BoC's Macklem sees 'worrying' signs in housing market

The Bank of Canada is seeing “worrying” signs that some Canadians are taking on too much debt to buy into the nation’s hot housing market. In an interview with the Financial Post, Governor Tiff Macklem said there is evidence that loan levels relative to home values are growing -- an indication that some borrowers could be overextending. He also warned people have begun to make purchases based on the belief prices will continue rising.

“Canadians are stretching and that is worrying,” Macklem said. “If Canadians are basing their decisions on the kinds of price increases that we’ve seen recently are going to continue indefinitely, that would be a mistake. They’re not sustainable.”

At the same time, Macklem indicated the central bank can do little given interest rates need to stay low to support the recovery.

His comments come amid increasingly urgent calls from economists for policy makers to cool the market. Over the past week, the Bank of Montreal’s Robert Kavcic and Robert Hogue at Royal Bank of Canada have issued reports warning officials they need to take steps to break the psychology of expecting continued gains in real estate. The ultimate concern is that rapid price appreciation could be destabilizing.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s government plans to introduce a tax on foreign non-resident home owners. Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said last week she is watching the market closely, without detailing any specific intent to take additional action.

Last week, Canada’s national housing agency added three more cities to its list of markets highly vulnerable to a sharp price drop, including Toronto. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. also said the recent broad-based price appreciation means overheating risks are now a national phenomenon, rather than isolated to a few major metropolitan areas.

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