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## Our foremost COVID risk

From the outset, Canada has applied basic principles of risk management to shape our path through to the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic and minimize lasting negative impacts.

This applies to various elements of the health crisis such as the economy, and certainly to issues related to vaccine procurement and delivery. Now those same principles are pointing to perhaps our most significant risk during this period when the crisis is arguably entering its most volatile phase yet - that risk is the social dimension of our human nature.

More on that in a moment... but first a few thoughts about vaccines through a risk management lens.

It's useful to recall that virtually no one thought a vaccine would be available for distribution before well into 2021 - at the earliest. Most vaccines take years to develop, not months. But in an astonishing achievement of scientists the world over, Canada approved its first vaccine on December 9th - less than 10 months after the onset of the virus in this country.

Risk identification and assessment drove aggressive and early action by Canada to secure vaccine supply. Prior to any vaccine approval, the federal government invested over \$1 billion in advance-purchase agreements with seven vaccine manufacturers. These arrangements secured a supply of up to 429 million doses for Canadians - the largest and most diverse vaccine portfolio in the world - providing options and flexibility. While securing vaccine supply addressed some key risks, risks also clearly existed in the extraordinary logistical challenges of vaccinating a country as vast as Canada with our climate and sparse population density.

### Collaborative effort

The federal government is responsible for procuring vaccines and distributing them to the provinces and territories. Provincial and territorial officials, who manage the health care systems, handle the logistics of delivering doses and decide which groups to prioritize. Overall, federal/provincial/territorial collaboration on vaccine distribution has been strong. For our part, we have committed federal resources to support the provinces and territories every step of the way.

The federal government has procured hundreds of ultra-low-temperature freezers for vaccine storage; distributed more than 14 million rapid tests, personal protective equipment and ancillary supplies such as needles, syringes, swabs, and gauze; and, not unimportantly, provided detailed vaccine delivery schedules so provinces and territories can plan effectively. As of Monday, approximately 72% of the 855,765 vaccine doses distributed to provinces from the federal distribution system have been administered. In BC, it's 74% of 117,875 doses.

### Supply risks

There continue to be many risks in the current volatile global vaccine marketplace, ranging from supply chain issues to manufacturing. I understand and share the concerns flowing from last week's announcement by drug manufacturer Pfizer-BioNTech of a temporary slowdown in its vaccine supply to Canada. But with continuing federal/provincial collaboration, we remain confident that 3 million Canadians will be vaccinated by the end of March, and all Canadians who want one will be vaccinated by the end of September.

However, while hope is now on the horizon, we must collectively hold the fort until September. We urgently need to contain further spread of the virus. Modelling shows a resurgence of COVID cases in the months ahead. The daily number of new cases now is more than triple that of the peak of the spring wave.

Which brings us back to the social aspect of human nature, emerging as possibly our most significant risk at this pivotal moment in the crisis. Physical distancing, washing hands and wearing a mask all remain imperative. But so, too, does steering clear of family and other social gatherings outside your immediate bubble - the most difficult thing for many of us, myself included.

Every one of us is tired. But if there was ever a time to double down on our efforts to limit the spread - it is now.

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