

Trudeau warns coronavirus restrictions could last weeks, months

March 17 2020

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday urged Canadians to hunker down for the long haul as business closures and people staying home to prevent spreading the COVID-19 virus could last weeks or months.

His administration, he added, was preparing to roll out a new package of financial supports to ease the burden on Canadians and businesses, and is considering using the Emergency Measures Act.

The measure, which has only been used once since the two world wars, would allow the government to suspend [civil liberties](#) and impose restrictions on the movement of people and goods—which so far have been mostly voluntary.

"We don't know exactly how long this is going to take," Trudeau told a news conference outside his residence where he and his family are self-isolating after his wife Sophie tested positive for the new [coronavirus](#).

"It could be weeks. It could be months," he said. "But we will be there, standing together to support Canadians in order to get through this extremely difficult time."

According to chief public health officer Theresa Tam, the number of cases in Canada has risen to more than 440, including five deaths. The latest fatality, of a man in his 70s in Ontario province, was recorded on Tuesday.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said turning to the Emergency Measures Act would be a "last resort."

"It's a very serious step, which grants extraordinary powers to the federal government," she acknowledged. "We would never introduce it without careful consultation."

During the First and Second World Wars, it was used to intern thousands of [recent immigrants](#) labelled "enemy aliens."

It was last invoked during the 1970 October Crisis in Quebec province to fight an insurrection, after the kidnappings of British and Quebec officials by the Front de Liberation du Quebec.

On Monday, Canada closed its border to most foreigners—except Americans.

Airlines were ordered not to allow passengers with flu-like symptoms to board, while all inbound international flights will be redirected to airports in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver, where public health screenings will be stepped up.

On Tuesday Westjet, Canada's second largest airline, announced it was suspending [international flights](#), after flagship carrier Air Canada said it would soon halve its number of foreign flights.

"As much as possible, stay home," Trudeau urged on Tuesday. "Don't go out unless you absolutely have to. Work remotely if you can. Let the kids run around a bit in the house."

"Things will get better," he said, but for now, as many nations grind almost to a halt, he said, expect that "pretty much anything with a door will be closed."

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