

Politics

# PM, health officials warn Canadians against believing COVID-19 'internment camps' disinformation

Disinformation campaign falsely suggests Canadians will be forcibly sent to quarantine sites

[John Paul Tasker](#) · CBC News · Posted: Oct 20, 2020 3:17 PM ET | Last Updated: October 20, 2020



Digital signboards along Highway 417 advise motorists that travellers arriving in Canada must complete a

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Canadians will not be forced into COVID-19 internment or containment camps, a spokesperson for Health Minister Patty Hajdu said Tuesday — taking aim at a disinformation campaign that has been circulating on social media for weeks.

The claim that the federal government is preparing to forcibly intern Canadians is patently false, the spokesperson said.

The federal government has announced funding for voluntary quarantine sites for some of the country's homeless and has made plans to expand self-isolation capacity for returning international travellers without suitable places to go, but Canadians will not be compelled to leave their homes for so-called COVID "camps."

"The answer is no, we're not building containment or internment camps," the spokesperson told CBC News.

"Disinformation like this is intended to deceive Canadians and cause fear and confusion. We encourage Canadians to double-check sources before sharing to avoid spreading disinformation."

Independent Ontario MPP Randy Hillier, a vocal anti-masker who has likened the current pandemic to [a bad flu season](#), has been warning his eastern Ontario constituents that the federal government is preparing to establish these "[camps](#)" for COVID patients.

In a recent exchange at Queen's Park, Hillier pressed the provincial Progressive Conservative government to detail what it knows about Ottawa's supposed plan to detain people.

"I ask this government if people should prepare for internment camps," Hillier asked during question period on Oct. 7.

"Your government must be in negotiations and aware of these plans to potentially detain and isolate citizens and residents of our country and our province," Hillier said in the

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Randy Hillier, MPP for Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston, speaks to reporters from Queen's Park. (Mike Crawley/CBC)

In a subsequent email to his online followers, Hillier said "the expansion of isolation/quarantine camps in Canada is something of concern."

Clips from Hillier's speech were circulated on websites like Brighteon, a source that has been [banned from platforms like Facebook because it pushes conspiracy theories](#). A meme was created comparing theoretical quarantine sites to Nazi Germany's concentration camps during the Second World War.

"Why are FEMA type camps going into every province in Canada," one site administrator said in

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Hillier's comments about these sites were reported by outlets like Life Site News, an anti-abortion website run by the Campaign for Life coalition.

Kingston, Ont. public health officials have [expressed concerns about Hillier's past comments](#) downplaying the threat of the virus. Hillier was suspended from the Ontario PC caucus in 2019 for allegedly mocking the parents of autistic children.

CBC News has received dozens of emails from people who fear that the federal government might soon force them into camps as COVID-19 continues to spread.

"I heard there were FEMA camps across the province," one person wrote to CBC — again using the name of a U.S. federal department. "Did you order tear gas and guillotines?"

(The Department of National Defence is looking to buy tear gas for a Saskatchewan-based facility — [exclusively for training purposes.](#))

"They brought up the internment camps in the Ontario legislature ... for the first time in my life I am afraid of my government. Never in my wildest dreams would I think I would be asking this question in Canada," another email said.

"Mr. Prime Minister are you preparing to put us in internment camps?" asked another. "Will these internment camps also be used to persecute & jail Christians and other undesirables?"

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Tuesday that he had to personally reassure a young woman during a recent virtual meeting that his government will not remove people from their homes to put them in containment facilities. He said he told her that she should turn to public health officials for accurate information on the pandemic.

"I had to explain that as we consume increasing amounts and various sources of information, online and around us, we need to continue to be attentive to source," Trudeau said.

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## Prime Minister Trudeau questioned about rise in fake news

4 months ago | 2:26

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau urges Canadians to listen to experts as misinformation and disinformation continue to spread online. 2:26

Trudeau said nefarious foreign actors and Canadians with an "extremist agenda" are bent on "weakening people's confidence in our institutions and our democracy" by pushing bogus theories online without evidence.

"There is a tremendous amount of noise and and harmful misinformation about on the internet ... we need to hold together and resist people who would sow chaos within our communities and our democracy," he said.

NDP MP Charlie Angus also has said he has been "inundated" by messages from people concerned about the possibility of being put in mandatory camps as hundreds of Canadians continue to contract the novel coronavirus.

"I want to say simply that there are no secretive internment camps being built," Angus said in a letter to his constituents.

"Government is not preparing to take people away or to impose some dark vaccine agenda."

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The site also could be used by other vulnerable people who do not have ready access to a safe place to self-isolate while they convalesce.

"As we work together to keep COVID-19 under control, this new site will help those for whom it's simply not possible to limit close contacts and self-isolate effectively at home," Hajdu said at the announcement alongside John Tory, Toronto's mayor.



Health Minister Patty Hajdu announced funding for Toronto to establish a quarantine site for homeless people who have tested positive for COVID-19. (Adrian Wyld/The Canadian Press)

No one will be required to go to such an isolation site, Health Canada confirmed Tuesday.

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setting," in a household with large families or many people, or in a small, shared apartment.)

Like public health agencies in [Australia](#) and India, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has set up quarantine sites across the country to accommodate international travellers who don't have access to safe places to quarantine.

There are now such facilities in nine Canadian cities — most of them hotels — with the capacity to lodge up to 1,600 travellers.

"These designated quarantine sites were established to accommodate travellers who did not have suitable isolation/quarantine plans, as well as those being repatriated at the onset of the pandemic," a Health Canada spokesperson said.

- **CBC INVESTIGATES** [COVID-19 quarantine exemption for Costco CEO shouldn't have happened, Ottawa says](#)

A recent Public Health Agency of Canada request for information (RFI) — indicating that the agency may soon launch a procurement drive to acquire more lodging to house Canadians who need to quarantine after travel — has further fuelled online speculation that Canadians will be required to leave their homes.

The Health Canada spokesperson said that by soliciting other potential providers of quarantine sites, the government is taking a "proactive" approach because there may be a greater need for quarantine space with the "eventual easing of travel restrictions and increases in traveller volumes."

Rather than manage all possible future quarantine sites, the agency is seeking information from would-be third party bidders who could fulfil such a contract. Some of the possible new locations, such as Fort Erie, Ont. and Niagara, Ont., are near U.S. land border crossings.

"The government of Canada is currently managing federal quarantine sites and the associated service contracts. Alternative options are being explored to remain flexible in adjusting to

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## WATCH: Dr. Theresa Tam is asked about bogus COVID-19 claims



### Canada's chief public health officer says it's up to everyone to fight fake news

4 months ago | 3:12

Dr. Theresa Tam answered questions today about the rise of fake news online during the pandemic. 3:12

"Information is spread faster than the virus itself," she said. "So be media smart as well as science smart, if you like. Yes, everyone is an armchair epidemiologist and everyone should actually be media smart at this point in time."



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