Canadian airlines and airport request end to testing on arrival

The Chief Medical Officers from WestJet, Air Canada and Toronto Pearson International Airport have sent an open letter to request the government halt PCR testing upon arrival.

"As every person travelling to Canada must take a PCR test prior to getting on a plane inbound to Canada and must be fully vaccinated, there is no good public health rationale for a second test upon arrival," the letter stated.

Passengers are already required to be fully vaccinated, and must take a PCR test before entry. Despite this, another PCR test is required upon entry, an unnecessary step that is contributing to a lack of tests available in the community.

The letter states that the positivity rate in communities is approximately 30% whereas the positivity rates at airports is 3%, and suggests that therefore the tests would be more wisely distributed to communities. Because the Omicron variant has spread so quickly, this has increased the demand for tests to such a degree that PCR tests have been rationed even to front-line workers and the most vulnerable.

"Removing arrivals PCR testing from Toronto Pearson airport alone would free up 8,000 tests a day for the GTA, which will help keep our most vulnerable — those in long-term care, hospitals and our children attending school — safe," said the letter.

Following are the suggestions made within the letter:

• Revert to surveillance arrival testing of international air passengers
• Require mandatory isolation for people arriving from an international location if they are exhibiting symptoms or test positive on a surveillance test

Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said last week that the government will continue its commitment to mass-arrival testing.

"We have the responsibility to make sure that there is as little importation as possible of COVID-19 and Omicron cases across the border," he said at a news conference Thursday.