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On the advice of Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, the government is also asking everyone to cancel gatherings of more than 50 people, Health Minister Patty Hajdu said.

The request came just days after Ottawa made an extraordinarily appeal on the eve of March break for all Canadians to stay within the country's borders. That advisory — to avoid all "non-essential" travel — stands.

Bottom line: The government says you should work from home if you can, don't fly off outside Canada unless you absolutely have to, and keep washing your hands and avoiding close contact with others.

Who is barred entering from Canada?

Proclaiming it's time for "increasingly aggressive" action, Trudeau announced Canada will close its border to everyone except Canadian citizens, permanent residents and Americans.

Other federal ministers later clarified that this restriction will start on Wednesday at noon. It won't apply to diplomats, people transiting through Canada, workers delivering essential services, and citizens' immediate families.

On top of that, Transport Minister Marc Garneau has ordered all airlines flying into Canada to screen and prevent any passenger with symptoms of COVID-19 from

boarding. As Trudeau put it, "anyone who has symptoms will not be able to come to Canada."

That includes Canadians with symptoms in other countries. The Prime Minister's Office said Monday evening that Ottawa will create an emergency loan program to help Canadians get home or cover "life-sustaining needs" while they remain abroad during the pandemic.

Canadians barred because of symptoms will need a medical certificate proving they're no longer symptomatic before they can fly home, Garneau's office told the Star.

This restriction only applies to international flights into Canada, and not border crossings on land. Canadians with symptoms who drive back from the U.S. will be referred to public health officials, the PMO said.

Trudeau urged all Canadians abroad to return as soon as possible.

"It's time for you to come home," he said.

Why aren't Americans barred like everyone else?

Trudeau and his top ministers were asked this repeatedly on Monday, and their answers basically boiled down to this: the U.S. is special.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said Canada's supplies of food and other essential goods relies the open flow of goods across the Canada-U.S. border.



Andrew Francis Wallace/Toronto Star
Airplanes at Toronto Pearson International Airport.

Freeland denied that the decision to leave the border open to Americans was made under pressure from the U.S. government; she said detailed work needs to be done with businesses, unions, provinces and American leaders to ensure essential trade isn't shut down.

"It is a dense and close relationship, and measures that we take there will be carefully thought through," Freeland said.

"Food supply in Canada is very closely connected with the U.S. economy, and the U.S. food supply is connected with greenhouses across Canada. So we need to act with great care and deliberation, and we will," she said.

Are these new measures strict enough? Perhaps not. Kevin Smith, president

and chief executive of Toronto's University Health Network, said the exemption for American travellers brings up the biggest questions about Canada's response.

"How does one not include our American colleagues in that travel ban when we know there is so much burden of illness in the States?" Smith asked.

He said if people are allowed to travel across the border, Canada should institute a "mandatory" 14-day isolation period for people entering the country. At the moment, people arriving in Canada without symptoms are being asked to acknowledge that advice — they're not forced to follow it.

"Again, we have a very limited window and it is closing fast on containing the virus," Smith said.

"I'm very sympathetic that (Trudeau) has a different lens he has to look through than we do. But what does the best evidence suggest we do? Go further, and do it fast."

Trudeau did not rule out doing just that on Monday, stressing — as he has for weeks now — that Ottawa will do whatever it takes to protect Canadians from the virus. He didn't rule out barring Americans from Canada at some point either.

"We're not closing the door to any measures," he said in French.

With files from Megan Ogilvie

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