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African Canadians not taking chances on Covid19 despite falsehoods of Black immunity



Actor Idris Elba

Despite social media chatter spreading the notion and unscientifically-tested premise that Black people are immune to the coronavirus, Africans in Canada are not taking chances.

Rumours swirled recently due to fewer incidences of contractions of the

virus among citizens of African countries as compared to the rest of the world, leading to the notion that Black people cannot catch the disease dubbed by the World Health Organisation as Covid-19.

Worried, because he has heard the rumours, actor Idris Elba, who contracted Covid-19, said it is "pseudo-science to think that coronavirus cannot affect Black people. No one is immune," he said, noting that such unfounded chatter "is dangerous".

Toronto-resident and lawyer Peter Kalu, whose background is Nigeria, agrees. "Anyone with common sense should not fall for hoaxes sur-

rounding Covid-19. Use your common sense, be wise. Coronavirus knows no-one of means, status, race, colour or religious affiliation; it can be contracted by anyone."

Some Black people like myself have caught the virus, Elba says, "so let no one trick you into a false sense of invincibility".

The World Health Organisation has said that fewer coronavirus cases in Africa is not an indication that the disease does not affect certain races of people, stating: "From the evidence so far, the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted in ALL AREAS, including areas with hot and humid weather. Regardless of climate, adopt protective measures if you live in, or travel to an area reporting COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 is by frequently cleaning your hands. By doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose."

Nigerian-Canadian residing in Toronto Eme-like Ukpabi adds that "this is the time for everyone to be more vigilant of scammers in every sphere of life and this includes people who spread rumours that have no basis in empirical data and no basis in science. Only a fool will think a virus will spare them because of the colour of their skin", he explains, stressing: "Black people should

take precautions and not fall for this blandishment that would ruin their lives and those of their loved ones".

Imam Abukar Mohammad of the Khalid Bin Al-Walid Mosque in Etobicoke, says he has warned his mostly Somali-born congregation in the GTA to take extra precaution at this time "especially in the face of these rumours concerning Black people and their immunity to the virus.

"We are not specially immune to it. There's no reason anyone should fall for this unproven claim. There's no science to it and it doesn't even make sense, he said. We closed the mosque to prayers and gatherings until further notice because we definitely don't have immunity to this sickness.

Somalia has recorded only three known infected cases at press time compared to countries outside of Africa with thousands of cases. "It is not because people in Africa are immune to Covid-19. It is probably because there are no test kits readily available in a poor country like Somalia," Muhammad said. Concur Kalu. "The few numbers in Africa could be the result of a combination of factors including the fact that test kits are not readily available or accessible by a large majority of people in Africa," he said. **Continued on P.2**

How Mali diva thrilled Toronto audience just before the pandemic shutdown



most effortless and dynamic superstar ever. She

If sheer presence on stage is anything to go by, Mali's Fatoumata Diawara would be considered the

weaves and bops through songs with a sonorous voice made from the heavens as indeed her griot background demands. Today, her *Fenfo* CD is making waves everywhere and little wonder was last year's nominee at the Grammys for best World Music Album of the Year. And just before her recent Canadian tour, she told me, "I am so grateful for that nomination. It means a lot to me that people from very far away are recognising me and what we do in Africa musically. I am from Mali, yes, but I feel I am representing Africa, the whole continent. I see myself as African first", she said, adding that "Africa is the home of music and I am happy that they are finally realising that".

Diawara brought to Markham's Flato Theatre her inimitable voice from griotland. Her new CD *Fenfo*, which means "something to say" in Mali's Bam-

bara language, means a lot to Diawara because this time she really has something to say. Advocating for hapless migrants around the world, she particularly notes that Africa's desperate migrants to Europe should be cared for like the human beings they are. "Too often it seems the world doesn't care about these Africans who are dying in high seas. This must change because they are human too. The world is full of problems," she says, "and we know that if a burning church in Paris [like the Notre D'ame] can be revived with donations overnight we can also try to help human beings with flesh and blood." This, she says, is the real message in her new CD. Diawara definitely has something to say and beginning this weekend in Montreal, Canadians will be treated to an earful

By Peter Uduehi

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CORONAVIRUS Update

Africans in GTA: pandemic unveiling many life lessons

By Peter Uduehi

Ontario premiere Doug Ford has extended the province's state of emergency by another 30 days until early May due to the novel coronavirus which produced a scare around the world in late February.



Pastor Oku

But nobody knows when schools are to realistically reopen given the deadly nature of the Covid-19, the World Health Organisation designation for the virus..

For many African parents, in lockdown with their children during this time, "this has been an eye-opener for me on many levels", notes Ghanaian-born Toronto resident Joseph Owusu.

He said the restricted movement of persons due to the pandemic has been a blessing in disguise.

"Here in Canada, we work like crazy with little time for family. I love the fact that my children are constantly within an ear-shot of me these times...I'm cooking...actually doing a lot of cooking for them, doing a lot of things with them, not because I'm the stay-away-dad type, but because I do more things with them now than before and I'm enjoying these moments," Owusu explains.

"As for my wife, it's also been a blessing in disguise," he stressed, adding "these relaxing times have offered us more opportunities to bond more and relate more for the benefit of our relationship."

Joseph Bandera, Toronto-resident of Zimbabwean extraction, could not agree more.

"My wife and I are relaxing more too and taking our time to know each other better instead of the rush-rush rat race we were in before coronavirus lockdown," he said. He added: "these days make it

better to listen to each other more and I feel like this is how life should be anyway".

In the meantime, some children (engaged now for several weeks with schoolwork at home via the internet as they respond to challenges from their teachers), are getting acquainted with distant learning.

"One new thing I learned about my son is that he is smarter than I thought he was before Covid-19 shutdown," says Bandera.

"With this shutdown," he continued, "I have had enough time to give a critical analysis of many things around me," noting: "usually I would do the things I needed to do around the house and in life because they were things I just needed to do, like taking my kids to school, preparing lunch for them, making sure their homework is done, etcetera...but now I am involved in the process of their education because they're full-time at home with me. And I can see that my son is smarter than I thought." he reiterated. "Process makes a difference and this shutdown is giving me a lot to process."

Still, many school children, according to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, are having an emotional rough-going because of the current pandemic, especially as "all of a sudden...you can't go on play dates or have sleepovers...and your March break was certainly different than what you've hoped for. I get it from my kids as well", he said in a special message to Canada's kids.

"The Prime Minister is right. It's true that things can change in life in an instant," says Bola Idowu, a Mississauga resident. She said for a long time she has not had the time to teach her 11-year-old daughter how to cook certain Nigerian meals she likes, but that this resting period has given her the opportunity to do just that. "My daughter is like a chef now," she said with a lot of laughter on the phone. "She's now perfect at preparing the coveted okra soup," Idowu adds. "There's always a silver lining in certain rough situations," she said.

Owusu's silver lining, and quite the eye-opener, is that "so-called religious pastors or men of God...as they call themselves...are swindlers and crooks. "They don't really care about your wellbeing." Asked why the harsh criticism of certain pastors, he said it is downright offensive for a pastor to ask members of his congregation to continue to pay tithes to the coffers of the church at a time when everyone is in shutdown mode and out of work.

"They (the pastors) develop an online process for their members to remind them of their duty to give a-tenth of their salaries to the church when most of them

cannot earn a living wage at this time.

"They (the pastors) are trying to impress upon their members the notion that those who are poor (or out of pocket due to the shutdown) should still give tithes because God, through some miraculous way, will always provide them with money. Why don't the pastors believe the same notion that God will provide them money miraculously?" Owusu asked, stressing that the restrictions brought on by the pandemic has been very revealing of the relationship between religious leaders and their flock.

"I have changed my concept of religion. Covid-19 shutdown has given me the opportunity to know what to accept and what not to accept. I have decided that it's important to look after oneself first rather than concentrate my energies on people who don't really care about your wellbeing," he said, adding: I think meditation is my new concept for higher spirituality."

Spiritual care coordinator Rev. Augustus Oku and pastor of the York Memorial Presbyterian Church in North York says "it's embarrassing to hear what fellow pastors are asking of their members at this hour of economic downturn and need.

He said members of his predominantly Nigerian congregation know not to expect any financial demands from him because this is the time churches should be giving back to their members.

"If I had a lot of money, and my church were a rich church, we would be giving a lot of money out instead of taking in money. Religion is not about money. It's about providing hope," he said.

"This Covid-19 lockdown has also taught me important lessons about the clergy and religion, because I am finding out that some of these so-called pastors behave like criminals. It's wrong what some of them are doing in the name of God," Oku, who has been a chaplain for prisons in the past, opined.

Africans not immune from Coronavirus

Continued From Page 1

In a scathing indictment, Kalu opined that "most governments on the continent just do no have what it takes to readily test and identify cases", noting that governments that cannot provide basic infrastructure for its citizens cannot be proactive in a pandemic like this. The hospitals are in a sorry state and most of the leaders do not even depend on the decrepit hospitals for their own health needs. They prefer to fly abroad for treatments and medical check-ups. I just hope there will be a new order at the end of this pandemic".

What African Newspapers are saying on the Continent

Lockdown could mean 15 m extra cases of female abuse

From The Thomas Reuters Foundation:

By Emma Batha and Ellen Wulforst



London/New York — A three month lockdown could result in an additional 15 million cases of domestic abuse globally, says UNFPA

The coronavirus lockdown could lead to a 20% surge in domestic violence as victims remain trapped at home with their abusers, the United Nations predicted on Tuesday, warning the pandemic will have a "catastrophic impact" on women.

Tens of millions of women may be unable to access contraception and millions more girls could be married off or subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) as a result of the pandemic, researchers said.

Every three months of lockdown could result in 15 million more cases of domestic abuse than would normally be expected, according to the UNFPA, the U.N. sexual and reproductive health agency which spearheaded the research.

The projections underscore what the United Nations has described as a "shadow pandemic" alongside COVID-19.

Many countries have already reported spikes in calls to domestic abuse hotlines. At the same time the lockdowns are making it far harder for services and charities to reach women isolated at home.

"This new data shows the catastrophic impact that COVID-19 could soon have on women and girls globally," said UNFPA head Natalia Kanem.

"The pandemic is deepening inequalities, and millions more women and girls now risk losing the ability to plan their families and protect their bodies and their health."

The researchers predicted that 44 million women in 114 low and middle-income countries could lose access to contraception, leading to 1 million unintended pregnancies, if the lockdown lasts three months and causes major disruption to services.

The figure would rise to 7 million unplanned pregnancies if restrictions continue for six months, according to the study carried out with Johns Hopkins University, Victoria University in Australia and global health organisation Avenir Health.

"These are very realistic scenarios," said Ramiz Alakbarov, UNFPA acting deputy executive director. "What we are saying is please do not deprioritize reproductive health and family planning services.

"This is a crisis within a crisis for women," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

UNFPA said health services may be too busy tackling COVID-19 to be able to provide family planning services. Women may also avoid visiting clinics due to infection fears or because of restrictions on movement.

The pandemic is also disrupting supply chains. Many types of contraceptive are expected to run out within the next six months in more than a dozen poorer countries, UNFPA warned.

Researchers also predicted there could be an extra 13 million child marriages and another 2 million cases of FGM in the next decade as the pandemic stymies global efforts to end both practices.

Deepening poverty caused by a global recession could also drive more families to marry off their daughters early, they said.

Nigeria, Iraq, Ethiopia and other countries were also mentioned in the report as food-insecure.

"Zimbabwe's worst drought in a decade has compounded the crisis engulfing the country, as economic collapse and political instability fuel political protests and social unrest, which may worsen in the coming months," the WFP report reads.

"Food inflation had increased to over 700% by the end of 2019 and is likely to rise further during the peak of the lean season between harvests in the first quarter of 2020.

"Farmers are struggling to access agricultural materials, bringing fears of another poor harvest."

The latest analysis from an International Food Classification report estimates that about 4.3 million people are facing severe acute food insecurity in the country and the figure is expected to rise through to March 2020.



World hunger hotspots identified

By Moses Matenga of the Zimbabwe Standard

The World Food Programme (WFP) has classified Zimbabwe as one of the 18 countries in the world that will likely come out of the deadly coronavirus pandemic in a worse off situation.

According to the United Nations agency, donor support was needed now "more than ever" for Zimbabwe and other countries affected by political instability as they fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

"For many people, WFP is the only source of food and survival.

"We need our donors' and partners' support more than ever to fight the twin threats of hunger and pandemic.

"Updated hunger hotspots report identifies countries at risk of plunging further into crisis as COVID-19 looms," the WFP said.

Zimbabwe was classified as "overheating" together with other countries like Haiti, Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger.

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Covid-19: Why can't we get data on race in Canada like the US?

Any journalist who has spent a considerable amount of time in the United States will tell you that policymakers are often guarding tetchy figures because of the ubiquity of freelance statisticians, self-anointed watchdogs and politicians ready to pounce

type of examination of trends you'll never know how to fix the ills in your society. You'll keep assuming that all is well when in fact tension is building up fast to the point where it becomes unbearable.

whose business it is to keep records for the Canadian government.

To be sure, the US is not Canada in many respects. The latter, in my mind, is more advanced than the former availing universal healthcare to all its citizens. What is more? The history of the United States is different considering that slavery was for a long time the mainstay of its economy; and the history of slavery still weighs heavily for the majority of the African-American population.

As Canada is a country more adept at promoting multiculturalism, Statistics Canada officer Oliveer Craig tells me that the Canadian government is not obsessed with the statistical breakdown of deaths along racial lines as it relates to Covid-19. "We do not have the same kind of urgency to correct the ills against Black people. The history of Canada as it relates to Black people is different", he said, adding: "I can see why the U.S. is producing these stats based on race."

"Here in Canada," Craig pressed on, "every citizen is equal. Statistics Canada can provide you the raw data and you will have to do the math on your own."

But Sophia Brown Ramsey, director of the Black Community Action Network in Mississauga, disagrees.

"The mere fact that Canada sees itself as better than America in terms of race relations is not enough to overlook problems of race in Canada. Racism is racism no matter how you dissect it. We should not just be comparing ourselves to the Americans, we should be comparing ourselves to the do's and don'ts and right and wrong."

"There's systemic racism in Canada of course," she explained, "and in order to address the smallest amount we should be able to present the facts for everyone to see so we can have a water-tight approach to stamping it out. We don't even need a small amount of it," she said. "We need the stats bare to prove that point and stamp it out for our collective humanity," Ramsey said.

*Oya Pan is a journalist and
African World News
correspondent on
US-Canada relations*



on the racialness of such numbers for a major effect.

Enter Canada and you find the opposite. It's hard for Statistics Canada to tell you off the bat, for example, how many White Canadians ate pasta the day before compared to their Black counterparts or Asian, let alone provide you with how many Blacks have been among the death toll in the current fight against the coronavirus pandemic. No authority in Canada will hand that to you easily although we are sure someone is keeping track of the trend.

In the U.S., happy and sad people keep track of everything based on race, Sports broadcasters are probably the worst when it comes to keeping track of figures as they go deep excavating things as minute as the first time rain first disrupted a Superbowl game in the history of American football, and whether the quarterback position was led by a Black or White player on one of the competing teams during that storm.

Subsequently, American government institutions keep track of everything based on race as well. They have to and they have to have them readily available for public consumption, often through the media. Of course every country on the world stage was not created equal but there is something good about keeping statistics based on ethnicities or race as it gives one a better look at who is being left behind in society. If you don't have this

"The mere fact that Canada sees itself as better than America in terms of race relations is not enough to overlook problems of race in Canada. Racism is racism no matter how you dissect it. We should not just be comparing ourselves to the Americans, we should be comparing ourselves to the do's and don'ts and right and wrong..."

Ramsey Brown

It is easy to understand why Americans are obsessed with the social indices figures. For a long time, a pariah to the human race for sins committed against Black people and other minorities, America is constantly being watched by all freedom-loving people the world over so it does not repeat the same egregious mistakes it unleashed on people, who, through no fault of their own, happened to be born with a different complexion.

It is my experience that Canadians don't like to talk about race and racial divisions; not because people don't see differences among peoples when they walk the streets, or know people who look different from them in their neighbourhoods. They see these differences indeed, but they're usually shy about their chatter because of fear of not appearing to be like the Ugly American. It's the same with Statistics Canada, the agency

Covid-19: Around Canada and the African events shutdown...

Some shows have been cancelled in Canada and others' fate are still up in the air

Afrofest Toronto

According to director of the Afrofest programme Peter Toh, "we are not yet sure if the July event will be cancelled entirely because of the coronavirus pandemic".

The festival of music and arts and culture is usually held in Toronto every first week in July. It is one of Canada's biggest open-air events of concerts and arts and craft showcasing Africa at its best. Musicians from all over the African continent are invited to perform. A great summer event at the Woodbine Park in the east of downtown Toronto, it usually hosts 250,000 enthusiast in one single weekend..

Mr Toh says "we are are still working out the modalities with concert sponsors and the city of Toronto as well as the scientists who will actually give us advice moving forward", noting the Covid-19 pandemic is real and everyone has to take precautions at this time. Who knows what will happen at this time in July," he added. "We just have to wait and see and hear from the experts."



Nuit d'Afrique Montreal

The Festival Nuitd'Afrique usually takes place between July and and Agust of every year and this year's event is also up in the year. Organisers say they will announce shortly if the event will actually take place as planned. The festival, considered one of the biggest in Canada during the summer, also features African music, arts and craft. Many heavyweight African musicians

from the Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Mali, and across the Black Diaspora to the Caribbeans have featured prominently at the event, which usually take s place at the Festival District in downtown Montreal. The great Senegalese musician once called it "an experience of a lifetime".



Habari Festival Toronto's Harbourfront:

The festival usually takes place in the middle of August every year for one whole weekened but now director of the event Nadine McNaulty says the event may not happen. "It all depends and like most people we are following the advice of the xeperts". Hopefully a vaccine for coronavirus will be out then."





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Three Toronto men sentenced 25 years in death of Nigerian-born Ogba



Three Toronto men whose adult lives have been spent in gangs were sentenced to 25 years without parole for the killing of Nigerian-born immigrant Nnamdi Ogba.

Ogba was minding his business walking to his car when three men waylaid him and shot him in his back. That was in 2018.

On the night of Ogba's death, Trevaughan Miller, Abdullahi Mohamed and Abdirahman Islow were driving around the Scarlettwood Court area of Etobicoke "looking for someone to kill as part of an ongoing rivalry," Justice Robert Goldstein, who presided over the trial, court documents show.

All three men belonged to a Toronto street gang, which was in conflict with another gang operating in the Scarlettwood Road area, Goldstein said.

The three men spotted Ogba before Miller and Mohamed both pulled out a handgun and fired shots at him from behind at around 11 p.m.

Ogba, who was walking to his parked car after visiting with a teammate from his recreational soccer team, was struck by "several bullets" in the back and died at the scene, police said.

The two men then got back into the awaiting getaway vehicle, being driven by Islow, and fled the scene.

Goldstein said the men showed no remorse for their actions in the aftermath of the deadly shooting as they "celebrated the killing" and checked news stories about it.

Lamenting the loss of her son in a victim impact statement via the virtual sentencing hearing, Margaret Nsosu, Ogba's mother, said: "two years, it's never been the same".

Stating that Ogba "had nothing to do with street gangs," Goldstein described these kinds of acts of violence as "foolish, childish and so dangerous to innocent civilians who want nothing to do with it."

Goldstein went on to say that Ogba had a "regular job at a regular company" and was a leader in his family.

In her statement, Nsosu said in Nigerian culture it is standard for Ogba to be viewed as a role model by his younger brothers.

"They looked up to you," she said. "Their knight in shining armour is gone."

"He was the glue that held our family together, the man of the house, he was full of love, a handyman, he would fix any broken thing in the house."



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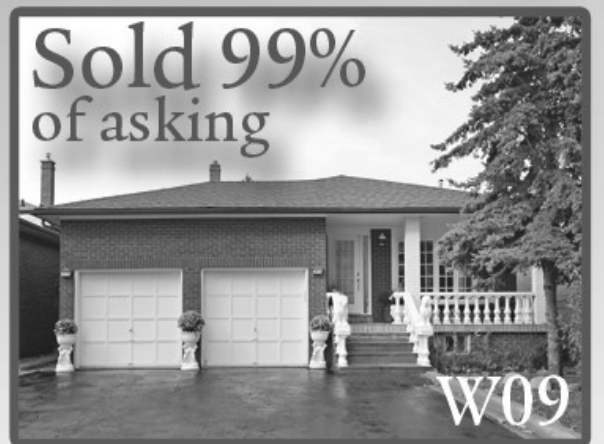
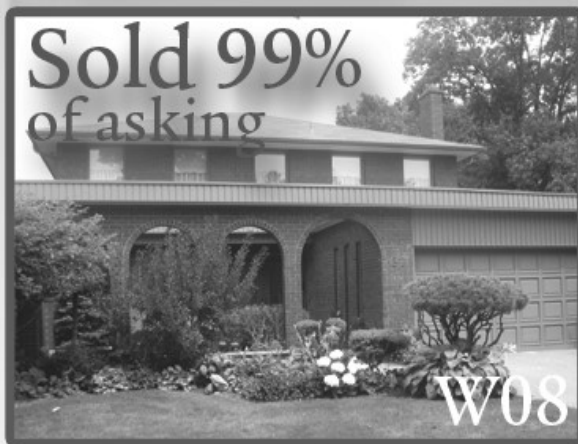
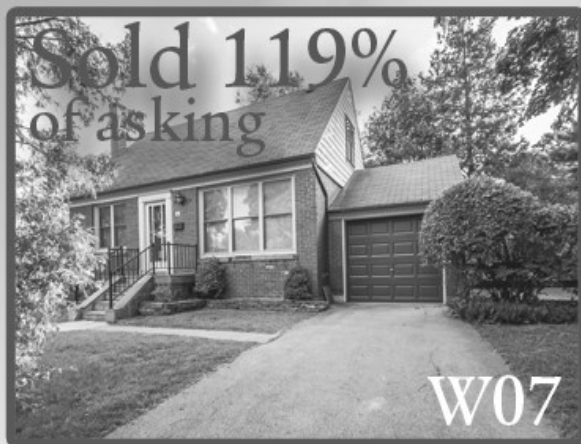


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