



The Honourable Jason Kenney
Premier of Alberta
307 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

January 15, 2021

EZMSA Office
Suite 201 12315 Stony Plain Road NW
Edmonton, AB
T5N 3Y8

Dear Premier Kenney:

Re: Expiration of Current Public Health Restrictions on January 21, 2021

The Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association (EZMSA) would like to recognize the success of the recent effective public health measures implemented by your government under Dr. Deena Hinshaw's steady guidance and the sacrifices made by the citizens of the Edmonton Zone to bend the COVID-19 case curve. It is now clear that the increased restrictions announced in December have greatly reduced the daily number of active cases from a peak on December 12, 2020, by approximately 50% as of January 11, 2021, in the Edmonton Zone.

Our Strategic COVID-19 Pandemic Committee is writing to provide our recommendations for a strategy to continue the success of the current public health restrictions past January 21, 2021.

While the COVID-19 restrictions implemented in December have worked, unfortunately Alberta still had the second highest provincial rate of active cases per 100,000 population between January 6-12, 2021. The decrease in daily active cases shows signs of slowing, possibly due to individual decisions not to limit contacts or forgo travel over the holidays or perhaps because of the arrival of the new more transmissible strain of COVID-19 in the province.

Hospitalizations in the Edmonton Zone did not begin to decrease until January 3, 2021 and have decreased less than 20% since then. ICU admissions have decreased about 27% in the same time period and are showing signs of plateauing. Worse, fatalities in the zone continue to rise steadily. The decrease of COVID-19 test positive rates from 10%, in December, to 6% is a



welcome sign that contact tracing, isolation, and quarantining is catching up with its backlog. However, it is still well above the 1% rate achieved by following the restrictions introduced last spring.

While the scheduled arrival in Alberta of approximately 400,000 doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines by the end of February is welcome, it is clear that the immunization of 200,000 Albertans will not be enough to slow transmission. We will need to rely on continued restrictions, with robust contact tracing, isolation and quarantining, to manage the spread of this virus for the foreseeable future.

In light of this evidence, the detection of multiple individuals with the new more highly transmissible UK strain (B.1.1.7) in the province, and with the unclear impact of school opening January 11 on transmission rates, the EZMSA believes it would be premature and highly risky to relax all the restrictions put in place in December. We are recommending a phased, evidence-driven, and controlled easing of the current circuit breaker restrictions to reduce the risk of needing further, more strict circuit breakers, with their potentially harmful consequences.

We recommend the following for this controlled easing of public health restrictions:

- Each phase should only go forward if:
 - transmission is under control (e.g., an R_0 less than 0.8 in the zone);
 - health care capacity including hospital beds, ICU beds, and staffing has sufficient reserve to justify relaxing restrictions.
 - contact tracing, isolation, and quarantining does not have a backlog; and
 - the new highly transmissible variant strain is being monitored and is not contributing significantly to transmission.
- Each phase should last for four weeks before a new phase is implemented to allow the success or failure of the previous changes to be evaluated.
- Controlled easing should be phased to begin relaxing restrictions that positively benefit physical, mental, emotional, and social health and have low probability of increasing community transmission first (e.g., easing restrictions to allow safe contact with socially isolated seniors and persons who are housebound).
- Easing of restrictions on in-person dining and drinking should occur only for outside spaces until either sufficient immunization has occurred or contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine activities have no backlog.
- Allowing indoor gatherings of a size sufficient to cause super-spreader events (e.g., public attendance at concerts and major sporting events) should not occur until herd immunity is achieved by immunization.
- When businesses are considered able to re-open, the “workplace guidance documents to help businesses reopen and resume operations safely” must be updated.

We offer these recommendations with the belief that a phased, controlled, and evidence-based easing of the effective restrictions announced in December is the best way to ensure COVID-19 remains under control. Avoidance of a return of exponential growth in COVID-19 cases is the



best way to reduce the health and economic impacts of the virus, while immunization of the population proceeds.

Sincerely,

Dr. James Talbot

Dr. Noel Gibney
Co-Chairs Strategic COVID-19 Pandemic Committee
Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association

AF/bjh

CC: Tyler Shandro, Minister, Alberta Health
Lorna Rosen, Deputy Minister, Alberta Health
Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Alberta Health
Dr. Verna Yiu, President & CEO, AHS
Dr. Paul Boucher, President, Alberta Medical Association
Dr. Erika MacIntyre, President, Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association