

September 13, 2021

Premier Jason Kenney

cc Minister Tyler Shandro, Dr. Deena Hinshaw

We, Alberta's Infectious Diseases physicians, are writing to convey our gravest concerns about the safety of the province's current COVID-19 approach, and to request immediate province-wide restricted access for unimmunized individuals to public indoor spaces for the purpose of accessing non-essential services. This measure can immediately decrease new infections, thereby alleviating pressure on hospitals, while avoiding widespread lockdowns, now and in the future.

Hospitals and ICUs across the province are under enormous strain and have reached a point where it is unclear if, or for how much longer, we can provide safe care for Albertans. The number of COVID-19 patients needing ICU currently exceeds the total number of fully staffed ICU beds. While surge capacity allows for additional beds, the human resources cannot be similarly scaled up. At the current rate, the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to ICU (90% of whom are unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated) will double every 2 weeks. Our healthcare system is truly on the precipice of collapse.

It is our opinion that the current measures do not go nearly far enough to interrupt transmission or reduce barriers to vaccination. It is also our opinion that the current state of healthcare capacity in Alberta is so dire that waiting to see results of current, less stringent measures will result in devastating consequences, further compromising our ability to care for Albertans with any medical conditions.

We are calling for urgent, decisive action to break chains of COVID-19 transmission. To prevent broad restrictions like those required in earlier waves, we are calling for immediate implementation of certificates of immunity that individuals must provide to enter any indoor public space for the purpose of accessing a non-essential service. This would ensure the safety of individuals who chose not to be vaccinated, enable businesses to continue to operate safely, and provide a strong incentive for vaccination. Leaving these decisions to individual businesses is resulting in inconsistent and confusing policies and inadequate uptake: these must be mandated by the provincial government, as is being done in nearly all other Canadian jurisdictions.

If this cannot be implemented without delay, evidence-supported measures familiar to Albertans should be reenacted immediately, such as gathering size restriction to include <10 unimmunized people, closure of the highest risk businesses (indoor dining and bars) and work-from-home measures, with government support for businesses. These measures are required to bend the curve and preserve healthcare access for Albertans.

Alberta's Infectious Diseases physicians stand ready to help Albertans through this crisis through direct patient care and a willingness to advise your government. We appreciate how difficult and complex COVID-19 related decisions are, and that the Premier must balance many issues and opinions. Nonetheless, we, the undersigned, firmly believe that only strong and decisive leadership through the above actions can avert an imminent public health crisis in our province.

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