

MEDIA STATEMENT

OHA Disappointed with Provincial Decision on Health Care Worker Vaccination

Toronto, ON, November 3, 2021 – “The Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) is disappointed that the Government of Ontario has decided against establishing a provincial standard for mandatory vaccination of health care workers. Our province has spent almost two years in a tireless fight against COVID-19 and the impact on our economy, on the health care system and on human health has been devastating. At this important juncture, Ontario cannot afford to let its guard down.

The Government of Ontario plays a leadership role in ensuring a uniform approach to key aspects of the health system’s response to the pandemic, such as case definition, screening and testing, and personal protective equipment. Health care worker vaccination policy is no different. *The Public Hospitals Act* already requires hospitals to have communicable disease policies in place requiring proof of vaccination/immunity for 17 conditions, including measles, rubella, varicella and tuberculosis. COVID-19 should be treated no differently.

Vaccination is the best way to keep hospital staff and their patients safe from COVID-19. While hospitals have robust infection prevention and control practices and adhere to provincial directives on personal protective equipment, it is vaccines that provide the highest level of protection against COVID-19. Vaccination has already had a meaningful impact in the long-term care sector for both residents and staff. Following the government’s implementation of a mandatory vaccine requirement for long-term care operators, the current number of outbreaks across all homes is lower than in hospitals.

There’s a strong consensus among Ontario’s hospitals for a provincial policy requiring health care workers to be fully vaccinated. In mid-October, 120 of 141 hospitals from all parts of the province, totaling 94 per cent of sector revenue and employing 166,000 staff, endorsed the position submitted by the OHA on mandatory health care worker vaccination. Unlike the approach taken in other provinces, the OHA has recommended that each hospital work towards achieving a provincial mandatory vaccination requirement in a manner and timeline based on their own circumstances to ensure stability of clinical services during this transition.

Given the sacrifices that have been made throughout the pandemic by businesses and wider society to protect the finite resources of the health care system, health care workers have a moral imperative to take every precaution possible to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The overwhelming number of health care workers who are fully vaccinated also deserve to feel safe and to deliver patient care in an environment that requires the highest level of protection available against COVID-19.

A provincial approach to health care worker vaccination remains vital to preventing the spread and scale of COVID-19. The OHA welcomes continued dialogue with the Government of Ontario on this matter.”

- Anthony Dale, President and CEO, Ontario Hospital Association

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