



Statement on Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination

August 2021

The COVID-19 crisis is not over.

COVID-19 is not the seasonal flu. It is much more deadly and has inflicted far greater damage on our health system, our economy, our livelihoods and the individual health of Canadians.

Canada's unions strongly support vaccination against COVID-19 for every Canadian that can be vaccinated.

Science has demonstrated that vaccinations – alongside other measures like enhanced indoor ventilation, masking and physical distancing – are the most effective ways to fight COVID-19 and keep each other safe. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, and maximizing vaccination rates is essential to defeating the virus.

Governments, unions, employers and the CLC have successfully collaborated in the “Faster, Together” campaign to promote awareness and increase vaccination rates. Labour strongly urges continued support and prioritization for these efforts.

Canada's unions are concerned with the potential of mandatory vaccination policies to hand employers overreaching powers, with workers bearing the consequences. The following principles and priorities are therefore fundamental to the labour movement:

Any decision to impose mandatory vaccination policies must be based on scientific evidence and be made by public health officials, not employers or unions. Rules must be clear, consistent and based on the determination of public health experts, rooted in scientific evidence. It cannot be left to employers or unions, or be made for politically motivated reasons. Where the science supports a vaccination disclosure/testing policy for high risk settings or other workplaces, unions will comply.

Unions must be consulted in the development and implementation of any mandatory vaccination policies. The implementation details and legal framework for mandatory vaccination policies are critically important. Exemptions, accommodations for disability and other needs and human rights and privacy protections are essential. Some workers cannot be vaccinated for health reasons and other legitimate and protected reasons; these workers must be accommodated.

Government and employers have an obligation to take steps to maximize access and minimize barriers to vaccination. Some workers face legitimate barriers to getting vaccinated. Vaccine access is a challenge for workers in remote and rural areas. Some workers face challenges in getting time away from work and caregiving

obligations. There are also systemic barriers facing low-income workers and those from racialized and equity-seeking groups. Some are hesitant and need education, information and support. Governments and employers have a responsibility to make vaccination as easy and straightforward as possible, including providing workplace and community vaccination clinics, paid vaccination leave and paid sick leave to deal with side effects resulting from vaccinations.

Canada's unions are clear: we all have a collective responsibility to halt the transmission of the coronavirus that is sickening and killing people in Canada and worldwide. Our personal health, but also our jobs and economic livelihoods depend on minimizing the need for further lockdown measures.

Unions reject threats of discipline or termination as an approach to increasing vaccination rates. Unions will defend workers' interests and insist employers respect the terms and conditions of the collective agreement and human rights codes. There are feasible and practical ways to respond to workers who are hesitant or opposed to vaccination. Regular testing, PPE, remote work, leave without pay and proven health and safety protocols are often feasible alternatives to discipline and termination.

Governments and employers have an obligation to ensure our workplaces are safe for workers. Unions insist that employers continue to fulfill their obligations to ensure workers' health and safety in the workplace, including personal protective equipment, enhanced ventilation, workplace hygiene, masking and distancing requirements, as long as health professionals, including experts in occupational health and safety, advise these should remain in place. Vaccinations must not be an excuse to drop these protections or to download their health and safety responsibilities onto workers' shoulders.

Privacy protections for workers and restrictions on employers' access to confidential health information are a must. Unions are concerned about the confidentiality of workers' vaccination information and the restrictions on employers' ability to access and share this information. Labour also opposes employers being able to ask for this information prior to employment or to make employment decisions based on vaccination status.

Canada's unions support public health measures to increase vaccination rates as an essential means of protecting Canadians' health and safety and defeating the COVID-19 pandemic. This must be accomplished in a fair, reasonable, transparent, equitable fashion with full consultation and negotiation with unions.