

April 29, 2021

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

Dear Premier Kenney,

As the third wave of the pandemic accelerates, we are deeply concerned about the well-being of our children and communities, as well as the imminent health crisis resulting from the continued spread of COVID-19 in Alberta. We are seeing an exponential rise in cases, high levels of test positivity and dominance of the highly transmissible B117 variant, which can cause more severe disease and higher mortality rates, including in younger populations.

We have witnessed how quickly hospitals in Ontario have become overwhelmed during the third wave. Alberta has the highest number of active cases per capita in the country (466/100 000 vs. 275/100 000 in Ontario) and currently has the same number of admitted COVID-19 ICU patients as in December 2020 just before the peak of the second wave. The time for incremental measures has passed, and restrictions implemented thus far have not blunted the rise in cases.

As pediatricians, we are particularly concerned about the impact of high community transmission on children and families including:

1. Disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on marginalized families such as those living in multigenerational households, families of essential workers, children living in poverty, minority and Indigenous populations.
2. Potential for increasing cases of MIS-C (multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children), a serious pediatric illness causing inflammation of major body organs including the heart, lung, blood vessels, brain, and kidneys. This condition requires hospitalization and can occur even after asymptomatic or mild COVID-19 infection.
3. Potential development of fatigue, muscle and joint pain, headaches, seizures, gastrointestinal problems, heart palpitations and other symptoms of long COVID in children who are infected – even in children with mild COVID-19 infection.

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4. Large number of school outbreaks and frequent school disruptions due to high community transmission, which lead to significant negative impacts on children's mental health, and social and intellectual development.
5. The potential for children to experience illness, long-term disability or death of a parent or caregiver due to COVID-19 infection.
6. Increasing hospitalizations and potential for severe illness in children as community transmission rises.
7. Effect of increasing adult ICU admissions on acute and inpatient pediatric care (need for Pediatric specialists to care for adult ICU patients, potential for adult patients to overflow into Pediatric ICUs).

Although 25% of Albertans have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccination, we have a long way to go until herd immunity. Children under 12 years old will be unable to receive the vaccine for the foreseeable future and cases in children are increasing, putting them at risk for complications like MIS-C and long COVID.

Furthermore, children 12-15 years old, although newly eligible for vaccination, will be required to have a physician's note unlike their adult counterparts with eligible medical conditions.

We have reached a juncture where only strong and mandatory measures can prevent our hospitals from becoming overwhelmed and keep our children and their families safe. We urge the Government of Alberta to institute restrictions recommended by public health and supported by scientific evidence, which may include closure of non-essential businesses and services, directives to work from home when possible, reinforced messaging about limiting indoor gatherings to household members only, and limitations on retail capacity to avoid crowding.

We recognize that these restrictions have their own harms, and we would urge the government to provide supports for businesses and individuals impacted by these restrictions. This includes implementation of paid sick leave, as well as more accessible and affordable mental health supports and childcare options.

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We commend your government for implementing paid time off for Albertans to be vaccinated. Other measures, such as these mentioned, must also be considered. The evolving evidence suggests that strong, proactive measures will not only minimize the third wave but will prevent the need for longer, more restrictive lockdowns that become inevitable when the health system becomes overwhelmed.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michelle Bailey, MSc, MD, FRCPC
President, AMA Section of Pediatrics

cc: Hon. Tyler Shandro, Minister, Alberta Health
Ms. Lorna Rosen, Deputy Minister, Alberta Health
Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Alberta Health

Sabrina Eliason, MD, FRCPC (Developmental
Pediatrics)

Renée Farrell, MD, FRCPC (Pediatrics)

Elsa Fiedrich, MD, FRCPC, Pediatrics &
Neonatology

Charlotte Foulston, BMSc, MD, FRCP, FAAP

Breanne Frohlich, MDCM, FRCPC, Pediatrics

Roxanne Goldade, BSc, MD, FRCPC, FAAP

Bonnieca Islam, MD, FRCPC

Tehseen Ladha, MD, MPH, FRCPD

Catherine Macneil, MD, FRCPC (Pediatrics)

Kyle Mckenzie, MD, FRCPC

Hasu Rajani, MBBS, FRCPC

Mary Pat Schlosser, MD, MHI, MPH, FRCPC

Sidd Thakore, MSc, MD, FRCPC

Andrew Wade, MD, PhD, FRCPC

Stephen Wainer, MD, FRCPC

Sam Wong, MD, FRCPC