

November 12, 2020

The Honourable Jason Kenney MLA
Premier, Province of Alberta
Office of the Premier
307 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Dear Premier Kenney,

As healthcare workers we feel it is our duty to warn of the impending health system crisis resulting from the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 in Alberta. We have reached a juncture where only strong and decisive mandatory measures can prevent our hospitals from becoming overwhelmed.

We therefore urge the Government of Alberta to institute a set of time limited public health restrictions that would consist of:

- directives to work from home for anyone who is able;
- limiting contacts to those within the household or support bubble;
- restrictions on group recreation/sports activities; and
- suspension of group indoor activities (including indoor dining, bars, casinos, religious services, and theatres).

Due to their vital importance, we should aim to keep schools open for in-person learning options.

We are seeing an exponential rise in cases, high levels of test positivity, and already have almost double the number of hospitalizations seen in the first wave. Intensive care unit admissions and deaths have also increased markedly in the past week. Even if transmissions drop today, hospitalizations, ICU admissions, and deaths will continue to rise for weeks as current infections progress.

There are outbreaks in at least 9 acute care hospitals, endangering vulnerable patients and resulting in bed and staffing shortages. As staff become ill or must quarantine, we do not have appropriately qualified individuals to fill their roles. Outbreaks in care facilities are also worsening bed shortages in hospitals as patients cannot return to their care facility where there is an outbreak.

The Edmonton zone has already deferred 30% of non-urgent surgeries to account for the burdens on the health system. More delays of foundational health services (surgeries, cancer screenings, and diagnostics) will be imminent and will be severely consequential if we do not act now.

We have witnessed how quickly hospitals in Winnipeg, the United States, Belgium, and Austria have become overwhelmed. The time for incremental measures has passed, and voluntary measures, requested October 9, have not blunted the rise in cases. Our testing system is strained, and contact tracing capacities have collapsed. We see no other way to break chains of

transmission and decrease cases, than to implement a “circuit breaker” of short, strict measures. Similar restrictions have been recently implemented in Winnipeg, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

We recognize that these restrictions have their own harms, and we would urge the government to provide supports for businesses impacted by these restrictions. The evolving evidence suggests that strong, time-limited measures will not only minimize the second wave but could prevent the need for the complete lockdowns that become inevitable when the health system becomes overwhelmed. A failure to control COVID-19 spread means we cannot expect our economy to recover quickly or strongly.

We are proud of Alberta’s health system and the quality of care we provide, but we believe that it is in grave jeopardy unless urgent action is taken. Please help us continue to care for the people of Alberta safely.

Sincerely,

Leyla Asadi, MD, MPH, FRCPC (Infectious Diseases)
Tehseen Ladha, MD, MPH, FRCPC (Pediatrics)
Christine Gibson, MD, CCFP (Family Medicine)
Amy Tan, MD, CCFP (Family Medicine)
Joe Vipond, MD, FRCPC (Emergency Medicine)

C.C. Honourable Tyler Shandro MLA, Minister for Health
Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Mr. David Shepherd, MLA

