

September 13, 2021 Health System Failure in One Month

Alberta, we are in a COVID crisis that is likely to overwhelm our hospitals and ICUs by the beginning of October. We are very close to requiring triage to determine who gets life-saving treatment and who does not. This means if you need care, the health system may not be available for you. There will not be enough resources for everyone who needs care. It may also become serious enough that we will have to emergency transfer patients out of province to get the treatment they need, just as Manitoba was forced to do in their third wave.

Let's review where we are.

1. New cases are at 1,500 cases per day and rising. This is the second worst infection rate in the country coupled to the lowest full immunization rate of any province. Our infection rate is twice that of British Columbia and five times that of Ontario.
2. Dr. Yiu, the CEO of Alberta Health Services, has reported that ICUs are at 87% bed occupancy with surge capacity added to the total. Our ICUs are actually at **130% of normal capacity**. We are taking from other health services to expand COVID care.
3. Needed planned (i.e. elective) surgeries, including cancer surgeries and heart surgeries, are being postponed indefinitely.
4. Even if the return of indoor masking announced last week has an effect, ICU bed occupancy will continue to climb for at least four more weeks.

Our projections show hospitalizations and ICU bed occupancy are at dangerous highs:

1. In two weeks we will be above the second and third wave.
2. Within four weeks we will be on the threshold of health system failure.

These calculations do not include the increased rate of new infections that are likely with people going back to school, back to work, and moving activities indoors with cooler weather. Those factors may push health system failure to be faster than a month.

Immunization rates have stalled and are too low to stop this fourth wave. The \$100 incentive program announced by the government last week is a complete failure and will not reach the 85-90% total population immunization we need to stop this wave.

The government has refused to reintroduce effective control measures and refuses to mandate proof of full immunization for entry into non-essential services. Without effective control measures or a significant increase to 85-90% of all Albertans fully immunized there is only one way that the fourth wave will end. The end will occur when most of the unvaccinated have fallen ill and recovered. This will put the maximum stress on the health care system and make acute care system failure a real possibility. With 820,000 unvaccinated Albertans over 12, this

would take many months during which the provinces health care system would be on its knees.

The worst part of the failed government response is not that they cannot do anything but that they won't.

We cannot emphasize enough, that if you have not been immunized, get the vaccine **now**. If you wait, with the active case numbers rising as fast as they are, you will get infected. When you do, the health care system will probably not be there for you. Even a single dose of vaccine now will increase your chances of surviving COVID, two weeks from now when the vaccine has taken full effect.

For the rest of us (the seven out of ten who are fully immunized) who are the majority, there are three actions we can take, even in the absence of effective government leadership, to reduce infections and save our health care system now.

1. If you are a non-essential business owner, a municipal government or an event planner, move to require an record of full immunization to attend your establishment now. That will protect your employees, clients, and bottom line. It keeps unvaccinated people from getting infected and putting stress on the health care system.
2. If you have been immunized, stop going to non-essential businesses or establishments that do not require proof of immunization to protect yourself and others.
3. It is your health care system. If you want it to be there when you need it, you need to make your voices heard by your MLA and the government. You need to be crystal clear that you will hold them and this government responsible for its failure to act to protect our precious health care system.

If you or someone you care about, has ever had to rely on our health care system in the past or may need it in the future, and you are grateful for the dedication and compassion of the people who work in it, please start acting today. For 18 months the people of Alberta Health Services have literally put their lives and their mental, emotional, and physical health on the line to protect us. It is time for us to repay that debt and honour their commitment by having their back when it counts the most.

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