



August 6, 2021

Premier Jason Kenney
420 Legislature Building 10800-97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Honorable Premier Jason Kenney:

**RE: Removing COVID-19 Public Health Orders –
Understanding Impacts and Concerns for Family Medicine**

The Alberta College of Family Physicians (ACFP) with over 5,000 members, is deeply concerned regarding the decision to withdraw public health-supported COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, and mandated isolation requirements of positive cases. The ACFP does not support this decision. The expectation that community providers will now be responsible for testing and managing COVID-19 disease as an endemic virus is unreasonable without meaningful consultation prior to this announcement.

This past week, we surveyed our members and they overwhelmingly expressed concerns regarding the rapid removal of the remaining public health measures to control COVID-19 disease in our province.

Family physicians articulated, in more than 800 comments, concerns regarding the health and safety of their patients and their families, their communities, and their staff. Waves of variants continue to spread. The increased Delta variant cases in Alberta, the low immunization rates (particularly in some local geographic areas of the province), and the inability of children under the age of 12 to be immunized must be considered in decisions to stop basic public health measures.

Evidence from other jurisdictions show premature stoppage of basic public health measures and low immunization rates have led to increased cases, increased hospitalizations of younger individuals, and most concerning increased cases in our children ineligible for immunization. In areas of our province with less than 40 % eligible adults receiving immunizations, children are at significant risk.

Most concerning is the impending fourth wave and the effect it will have on our children, our unvaccinated populations, and those who are immunosuppressed and may have less response to vaccines. As we watch our colleagues, south of the border, in jurisdictions which have lifted most public health measures and have similar immunization rates, we are seeing increased pediatric cases, full hospitals and ICUs, and some of the highest case rates seen during the pandemic.

Our understanding of the Delta variant is evolving. As outlined in the Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association letter, there is the evidence that fully immunized individuals that are infected with the Delta variant and asymptomatic, have high viral loads and can transmit the infection.



The expectation that family physicians will take over the testing of individuals with COVID-19, while also managing multiple other respiratory viruses to be circulating is not feasible. Family physicians have outlined numerous concerns regarding this: they have inadequate PPE; not enough staff, and inadequate space in clinics to support testing. Many stated they would not be able to offer this to patients. This will lead to increased pressures on already stressed Urgent Care and Emergency departments, at a premium expense to Alberta's health care system.

Members also shared the concern of providing mixed messaging to the public—the messaging has completely reversed from 18 months of advice to be tested if you have symptoms to a “call your doctor only if you are very sick”, isolate if you have tested positive, or have been in close contact. A cohesive public communication and education plan requires time, planning, and transition supports.

The Alberta College of Family Physicians recommends:

1. Continuing to test, trace, and isolate as basic public health measures until we see stabilization of case numbers
2. Provide meaningful consultation with community family physicians and our colleagues in the acute care, to understand the impact to the health system in order to better understand the context and challenges they face prior to implementing changes
3. Review of evidence of the impact of the Delta variant (and all variants that emerge) and its infectivity and pediatric implications, as well as the possible transmission through fully immunized asymptomatic individuals
4. Provide metrics, evidence, and rationale for removal of testing, tracing, and isolation which would be informed by the evidence review
5. When immunization rates, case numbers, and hospitalization metrics are achieved, commitment to the development of a transition plan which includes a public-facing education and communications, a robust, public-facing, and functioning surveillance system, and contingency plans with metrics to implement supports for outbreaks and adequate supports for community physicians for safe care of their patients and families, their communities, and themselves

We are willing to meet with you and your staff to discuss potential solutions.

Sincerely,

Sudha Koppula, BSc, MD, MCISc, CCFP, FCFP
President
Alberta College of Family Physicians

CC: Hon. Tyler Shandro, Minister, Alberta Health
Mr. Paul Wynnyk, Deputy Minister, Alberta Health
Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Alberta Health
Dr. Verna Yiu, President and CEO, Alberta Health Services

Encl: Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association Letter, August 4, 2021