



CANADIAN FEDERATION
OF NURSES UNIONS
LA FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE
DES SYNDICATS D'INFIRMIÈRES
ET INFIRMIERS

CFNU Statement
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Vaccines are not a panacea: public health measures must continue in Canada

Throughout the pandemic, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions has called for a precautionary approach to preventing the spread of COVID-19. What this means is: in the event of scientific uncertainty, the CFNU will always err on the side of caution and prudent action.

We are currently at an important juncture where Canada's success in combatting COVID-19 hangs in the balance.

We are now one of the world leaders when it comes to vaccination: as of mid-July, about 80% of the eligible Canadian population had received one dose of the vaccine, and just over 40% were fully vaccinated. Every Canadian who has rolled up their sleeve has played an important role in this achievement.

This success has prompted many jurisdictions in Canada to begin opening up. But even as we spill into stores and onto patios, we are seeing the impacts of new variants, such as the Delta variant, which is proving far more transmissible. It is estimated to be 225% more infectious than the original version of COVID-19.¹

Delta has rapidly become the dominant strain in many countries around the world and is spreading throughout provinces in Canada. As a result, there have been variant surges in Israel, the UK and the U.S. At the end of June 2021, Israel, which has one of the highest rates of full vaccination in the world, reinstated mask use in indoor spaces as infections spread.

Even as our vaccination rollout continues, there are still many Canadians who remain vulnerable even as first dose vaccinations appear to be slowing. Some regions in Canada, and some age groups, have much lower rates of vaccination than others. Those under 12 years of age remain entirely unprotected. Millions of Canadians remain at risk even as experts suggest that up to 90% of Canadians will need to be fully vaccinated to keep COVID-19 under control.

Around the world, the vaccination effort is slow; much of the world has yet to achieve access to vaccines. Vaccine hesitancy remains an obstacle.

This is why the World Health Organization said last week that we are at "a perilous point"² in the pandemic. The WHO's head of health emergencies, Dr. Mike Ryan, recommended a cautious approach: "...we would ask governments to be really careful at this moment not to lose the gains you've made, to open up very carefully."³

At the end of June 2021, the World Health Organization urged fully vaccinated people to continue to wear masks and practice physical distancing and other safety measures as the highly contagious Delta variant spreads rapidly across the globe. Noting that vaccines alone will not stop community transmission, the WHO asserts that ventilation, hand hygiene and avoiding overcrowded spaces remain key measures.⁴ Similarly, the PHAC at the end of June 2021 advised particular prudence on the part of unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals, with continued mask wearing under most circumstances in indoor settings and some outdoor spaces; it advised everyone to wear masks in any crowded indoor or outdoor spaces.⁵

However, some jurisdictions are opening up and abandoning most, if not all, public health measures to combat COVID-19, assuming vaccines are a panacea.

Because most often you will not know the vaccine status of others around you, and millions remain at risk, the CFNU recommends that while community transmission continues, and until more Canadians are fully vaccinated, Canadians continue with public health measures, including masking, physical distancing, hand washing, avoiding crowded places whenever possible, and ensuring appropriate ventilation.

This marathon is nearing its end: let's not stumble and fall along the path to victory.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/07/08/1013794996/why-the-delta-variant-is-so-contagious-a-new-study-sheds-light>

² <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/covid-19-virtual-press-conference-transcript---7-july-2021>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisondurkee/2021/06/25/who-urges-fully-vaccinated-people-to-continue-wearing-masks-as-delta-variant-spreads-but-no-word-from-cdc/?sh=6c5f2cbb41f9>

⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/awareness-resources/vaccinated-against-covid-19-public-health-measures/vaccinated-against-covid-19-public-health-measures.pdf>