



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

CFNU Statement
September 27, 2023

COVID-19 fall 2023 statement

As COVID-19 levels in our communities grow, nursing unions are calling on both the federal and provincial governments to take proactive steps, including widespread public education to combat vaccine disinformation, to protect the safety of health care workers and the health of Canadians.

Recommendations

- Support the National Advisory Committee on Immunization's (NACI) strong recommendation to get vaccinated with the newly approved omicron subvariant COVID-19 booster to provide enhanced immunity to prevalent strains. For more information, see CFNU's [COVID-19 Vaccination Position Statement](#).
- Call on governments and employers to ensure evidence-informed personal and systemic protections against COVID-19, including adequate PPE, are in place for nurses and all health care workers. Ensure that all employers secure and report evidence of sufficient stock of and reliable supply chains for fit-tested N95 respirators. These should be made available and accessible for all health care workers. Also see [CFNU's position on the Need for Transparency Regarding the PPE to Protect Health Care Workers](#).
- Review masking policies in health care facilities as local situations progress. For more information on CFNU's COVID-19 preparedness policies, see [Safety is Not Negotiable: Pandemic Preparedness – the Coronavirus 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).
- Continue to call for improvements to long-term care which has been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Not enough has been done to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. Also see [CFNU's campaign for improvements to long-term care](#).

The issue

- The prevalence of COVID-19 is again increasing in our communities, and the risks are still real.
- Health Canada's September 6 and September 12, 2023, COVID-19 epidemiology updates indicate rising COVID-19 activity across the country. A trend of increased cases has been noted in most provinces and territories, national test percent positivity is growing, and outbreaks are increasing.¹
- COVID-19 still poses significant health threats in the short and medium term.² A comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of COVID-19 are still unknown.
- Emerging evidence suggests that approximately 10-20% of people experience what is known as post-COVID condition at 12 weeks after their initial infection. Symptoms can range, but it negatively impacts health and well-being of those impacted.^{3,4,5}

- The seasonal nature of COVID-19 has not yet been definitively established, however, other respiratory viruses such as Influenza do present in a seasonal cycle with peaks in the fall and winter.⁶
- New variants are being monitored, and their sensitivity to older vaccines and immunity from previous infections is waning.⁷
- The Omicron (XBB 1.5) subvariants are the most prevalent variants of SARS CoV-2 circulating, accounting for about 99% of samples sequenced. Vaccine effectiveness is waning for older (monovalent) immunizations, which do not include Omicron subvariants.⁸
- NACI has released updated vaccination guidelines as new variants are arising and vaccine efficacy from the original series is waning. Being fully vaccinated, including recommended booster doses, is strongly recommended.
- Flu vaccines will be available around the same time as updated bivalent boosters, and both can be taken at once.⁹
- Masking remains an important defense against COVID-19 outbreaks, however, masking and other PPE precautions have continued to relax in recent months. Given rising numbers and new variants, these policies may need to be reexamined, and access to sufficient quantities of PPE should be verified and reported.

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada. (2022). Covid-19 epidemiology update: Current situation. Canada.ca. Retrieved from <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/current-situation.html>

² Raman, B., Cassar, M.P., Tunnicliffe, E.M., Filippini, N., Griffanti, L., Alfaro-Almagro, F., Okell, T. et al. (2021). Medium-term effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection on multiple vital organs, exercise capacity, cognition, quality of life and mental health, post-hospital discharge. *EClinicalMedicine* 31.

³ Quinn, K. L., G. M. Katz, P. Bobos, B. Sander, C. D. McNaughton, A. M. Cheung, M. S. Herridge et al. (2022). Understanding the post COVID-19 condition (long COVID) in adults and the expected burden for Ontario. *Science Briefs of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table 3*, no. 65: 1-32.

⁴ World Health Organization. Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19): Post Covid-19 Condition. World Health Organization. Accessed September 25, 2023. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-post-covid-19-condition](https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-post-covid-19-condition)

⁵ Public Health Agency of Canada. Covid-19: Longer-Term Symptoms among Canadian Adults – Highlights. (March 24, 2023). Canada.ca. Retrieved from https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/post-covid-condition/?utm_source=stakeholder-weekly-newsletter&utm_medium=link&utm_content=en-10-24-22&utm_campaign=srt-stakeholder-weekly-newsletter

⁶ National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). Guidance on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in the fall of 2023. (July 11, 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-guidance-use-covid-19-vaccines-fall-2023.html>

⁷ NACI. Guidance on the use of COVID-19 Vaccines Fall 2023. (July 11, 2023).

⁸ National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). Addendum to the guidance on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in the fall of 2023. (September 12, 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-addendum-guidance-use-covid-19-vaccines-fall-2023.html>

⁹ NACI. Guidance on the use of COVID-19 Vaccines Fall 2023. (July 11, 2023).