

February 15, 2022

Honourable Jason Kenney
Premier
Premier@gov.ab.ca

Honourable Jason Copping
Minister of Health
Health.minister@gov.ab.ca

Honourable Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education
Education.minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Premier Kenney, Minister Copping, and Minister LaGrange,

As the AMA Section of Pediatrics, we are very disappointed and concerned about your government's plan to lift public health protections. This announcement comes while our health system remains under significant strain due to staff shortages, test positivity rates are still in the 30% range and there continues to be unsustainably high rates of daily hospitalizations, ICU admission and deaths due to COVID. Lifting these protections now will only increase the strain on our already strained health care system. Meanwhile, the re-allocation of resources to meet the "surge" demand of COVID hospitalizations has come and will continue to come at the cost of health care services for other patients, including children.

Although COVID is often milder in children, it is not harmless. We have seen increased hospitalizations in extremely young children with COVID and Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) in older children. We have watched pediatric ICU beds be used for adult ICU patients. We have seen youth suffering prolonged symptoms after mild COVID infections. We have seen therapies for children with disabilities cancelled due to redeployment of staff to support the surge of COVID patients. We have supported children experiencing mental health and developmental issues exacerbated by the unmitigated spread of COVID causing school and activity disruptions. We have been left wondering what resources will be left for children with complex developmental, medical and mental health conditions and what impact the lack of access to these supports will be on their lives and their families. There have been significant negative impacts on children and their families, not only from the public health measures themselves, but also from having put these measures in place because of uncontrolled spread of COVID due to premature removal of public health protections by your government.

We have watched for two years as the health of children has been put behind the health of adults with COVID. The cost of this is reaching a point of crisis and will not improve if COVID cases continue to rise. Your government's plans for removal of public health measures have come without the necessary commitment to investing in protecting our children and communities. We need your government to prioritize the community accessibility of COVID vaccination for all eligible children along with concomitant education and awareness campaigns. This could happen through school vaccination sites, public-transit accessible vaccine sites and community outreach programs. We need a strong and clear message from your government that acknowledges the evidence that COVID vaccines are safe and one of the best ways to protect our children backed by equally strong measures to improve accessibility to pediatric COVID vaccinations.

Letter to Premier, Ministers of Health and Education

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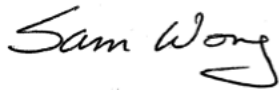
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We know that masks reduce transmission of respiratory infections including COVID and the large majority of children do not mind wearing masks. There is currently no evidence that masking in school situations negatively impacts children's mental health or development.

Until we are at a point where larger numbers of children are vaccinated and case rates are consistently low, it is vitally important that we keep in place the protections that have led to Canada having one of the lowest death rates per capita among the developed countries of the world. This means continuance of masking in indoor spaces including schools, optimizing ventilation, isolating when symptomatic or COVID positive, using rapid tests appropriately, and getting booster doses of the COVID vaccine when eligible.

Without adequate control of COVID infection rates, families risk daycare shut-downs, school closures and activity cancellations due to outbreaks and health resources will continue to be redirected from children to treat hospitalized COVID patients. Rampant COVID transmission in the community is a major factor in families' decisions to keep their children home to avoid exposures that may occur via activities and socialization. The long-term health and development of Alberta's children is dependent on consistent and adequate mitigation of COVID. It is time for our province to truly start putting children first.

Yours sincerely,



Sam Wong
President, AMA Section of Pediatrics

cc: Rachel Notley
Leader of the Opposition

David Shepherd
MLA for Edmonton-City Centre
Health Critic

Sarah Hoffman
MLA for Edmonton-Glenora
Opposition Deputy Leader
Education Critic

Dr. Vesta Michelle Warren
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Mike Gormley
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