

To the patients, families, and community members of Ontario,

We are doctors who are also parents, children, and your neighbours in Toronto, Peel, and York region. We see what our patients and communities have given up and may lose again this summer if we don't take immediate action: time with extended family and friends, trips home and vacations, summer jobs and summer camps, pickup basketball, and relaxed breaks with colleagues at work. You can only see your closest loved ones in hospital and in long-term care, and it's been painful. You've been doing your best to follow public health advice, but it hasn't been enough. In order to control the pandemic, get society back on its feet, return the healthcare system back to normal, and let the economy grow again, more needs to be done immediately.

Our health care system cannot withstand where this third wave is headed. The new variants we are seeing are spreading faster and hitting a younger population. Our ICU capacity has never been tested this way before, and the dedicated medical and other healthcare staff running the Emergency Rooms, COVID wards, and ICUs in hospitals across this province are stretched to the breaking point. Even in cities with less COVID, ICUs are filling up with transfers from the rest of the province.

We know you're tired and worried too. Already, many of you have avoided going for tests due to fear of becoming infected, missed your routine appointments, or had surgeries and tests cancelled for the second or third time during this pandemic. The need to cancel surgeries is now a province-wide problem. These are surgeries for cancer, for heart disease, for preventing blindness, for severe pain. More delays are going to mean people will have cancer spread through their bodies when it could have been stopped, lose their sight, lose their ability to walk, or die unnecessarily. We are worried about being able to care for all of you, whether or not you get COVID. If your teenager has a car accident or your child has a severe allergic reaction, if your grandmother falls and breaks her hip, if you have a stroke, we worry that we won't be able to provide the level of care that you need and deserve. We need highly-trained people and beds in our hospitals to provide care, and the projections for our ICU beds are dire and unforgiving: if nothing changes, we will not have enough room to care for you or your loved ones. You will have seen the clips about hospitals in Italy and New York City last year; make no mistake, this is what we will soon face if we don't make changes now.

There are ways to avoid this collapse of our healthcare system, but they require immediate action.

As doctors in some of the hardest-hit regions in Ontario, **we want each and every one of you to raise your voices – to tell your MPP and the Minister of Health and the Premier – that you are worried about your healthcare in this pandemic, whether you get COVID or not, and that they need to take immediate action to protect you.** Call, write, text, or tweet to tell them to take the following steps for the people of Ontario in order to protect the workplaces where COVID is spreading, put vaccines into the right arms in the right places, and provide the public with clear, consistent information.

Protect the workplaces where COVID is spreading:

Workplace spread of COVID remains a major problem. The government has already enacted policies to protect nursing homes and retirement homes from COVID. Let's learn from that experience and apply it here. We ask for policies that:

- Support and enable companies to use more COVID testing across their factories, warehouses, grocery stores, and construction sites
- Create an equitable and transparent process to take vaccines right into the workplaces that are most at risk
- Prevent Ontarians from having to choose between going to work sick and paying their rent. Until we have COVID under control across the province, mandate that companies give workers paid 'COVID recovery days' so they can stay at home if they are sick and so they can quarantine for two weeks without worrying about losing their jobs if they've had a confirmed close contact with someone with COVID
- Subsidize and/or incentivize the small, medium, and large businesses that may need help paying for their workers' safety. We know you want your tax dollars spent wisely. It costs us \$3592 for every day someone spends in the ICU and \$114 a day to pay for a minimum wage worker to stay home when they're sick. Let them get tested and self-isolate instead of infecting their coworkers
- Ensure that only people who absolutely have to be at work in person to do their jobs are allowed to be there. Create benefits or fines so businesses will want to support everyone who can work from home to do so, and enforce these with unannounced visits from the Ministry of Labour
- Require all workers to wear masks in all workspaces, the entire time they are at work, just as your children have to do when they are at school, only removing their masks to eat in a socially-distanced manner

If essential businesses need to stay open, they should do so safely to avoid COVID spreading. While nothing can be as safe as staying at home, we would rather see Ontario's workers spending time in their own workplaces than in our hospital beds.

Put vaccines into the right arms in the right places:

Severe COVID infection is preventable with vaccines. At this point vaccines on their own aren't going to be enough to prevent our health care system from collapsing, but vaccinating Ontarians is still the best way to get out of the pandemic in the long term, to restore Ontario's economy, and to stop worrying about lockdowns. To make this happen as fast as possible, we must prioritize vaccination for the people at the highest risk of catching, spreading, and getting sick from COVID. That isn't happening right now

COVID has struck hardest in the neighbourhoods made vulnerable by chronic injustice and systemic racism, so we need to fight it the hardest in those neighbourhoods. We ask for policies that:

- Send many more of the available doses to the hotspots identified by the Ontario Science Advisory Table until we can get things under control in those areas

- Ensure that the plan for vaccine distribution is transparent to members of the public and that appointments are easy to access – there are lots of creative ways to do this and doctors are eager to help!

Provide the public with clear, consistent information:

Thankfully, we know much more about COVID than we knew a year ago. Ontarians need clear guidance about all aspects of managing COVID in their daily lives. The Government of Ontario should be the trusted authority communicating our latest knowledge about COVID. We ask for policies that:

- Improve public messaging about the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine and about the relatively low risk of blood clots compared to the vaccine's very large personal and community benefits
- Remind the public that it is still risky to go into stores and other indoor settings for longer than absolutely necessary
- Encourage people to continue masking, to stay home as much as possible, and to stay away from people outside their households
- Provide clear, practical, current, and reliable guidance for all Ontarians, whether they been vaccinated once, twice, or not at all. Tell them what is safe to do and not to do right now, and acknowledge that this will change as the virus changes, as scientists learn more, and as more people are vaccinated

This is a crucial moment for the people of Ontario, for its economy, for its people’s health, and for our collective futures. Nobody can do this alone and we need your vocal support to keep you and your families and communities safe and out of our hospitals.

Raise your voice! Tell your friends and family, share this on social media, or write to your local newspaper! And be sure to call, write, text, or tweet to your MPP, the Minister of Health, and the Premier to tell them that you are worried about your healthcare in this pandemic, whether you get COVID or not – and that they need to **protect the workplaces where COVID is spreading, put vaccines into the right arms in the right places, and provide the public with clear, consistent information.**

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