



October 4, 2021

Dear Premier Moe, Minister Merriman and Dr. Shahab,

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Paediatric Society to express our significant concern over the COVID-19 crisis in Saskatchewan and to urge immediate action to reduce the suffering of children, youth, and families across the province.

With all-time high case counts and the lowest vaccination rate in the country, stronger action is urgently needed to bring this crisis under control. As paediatricians, we are particularly concerned about the health and safety of those under the age of 12 who are still ineligible for vaccination, as well as those aged 12-17 who have still not been fully vaccinated. Targeted efforts to increase vaccination rates are needed in the Far North Central and Far North West in particular, where full vaccination rates for those aged 12-17 are only 22 and 35 percent respectively. With 20 percent of cases in Canada now in those aged 19 or younger, the health and well-being of youth must be prioritized in any response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are extremely worried about the direct health impacts of Saskatchewan's COVID-19 crisis on children and youth and are anxious about the threat posed to their access to education, community supports and essential services. Children and youth suffered immeasurably from school closures and social isolation in 2020/21. We must do everything possible to ensure they can benefit from in-person learning, peer connections and social and extracurricular activities this year. As such, we advise mandatory immunization for all adults working in schools or child care settings (or mandatory regular testing for those who cannot be vaccinated). Given the high community transmission at present, we advise expanding the indoor masking requirements in schools and child care settings to include all those over the age of two, including when seated at a desk or table (with limited exceptions including for eating/drinking, health conditions, or if they are unable to remove the mask without assistance). We support the resumption of mandatory isolation requirements for any household contact who is not fully immunized and for those who have COVID-19 symptoms or test positive. We advise mandatory testing, reporting and contact tracing of all COVID-19 cases in schools and child care settings. And we recommend that preparations begin now for in-school vaccination clinics for the seasonal flu and COVID-19, in anticipation of a Health Canada approved COVID-19 vaccine for those aged 5-11 years of age.

Given the high transmissibility of the delta variant and the rise of active cases throughout the province, we are witnessing a significant increase in cases amongst children and youth. As adults, we must do everything in our power to protect the health and well-being of Saskatchewan's children and youth – especially given their continued ineligibility for vaccination. We therefore urge you to implement the above recommendations immediately to reduce the threat this crisis poses to Saskatchewan's youth.

Sincerely,

Ruth Grimes, MD
President