



## **/COVID-19/ CEO Message: The Unvaccinated are Making a Choice About *Your* Health Care**

Wednesday, I met with our Executive Leadership Team to determine what actions we can take that are within our control to manage the unprecedented pressures facing our health system.

Together, we worked through a plan to slow down and pause certain work to help us focus on COVID. And in the coming days, our leaders will be working together to implement these to help us cope with the extreme stress on our teams.

But the harsh reality is: *there are no easy choices*. We will slow down services, but that will have consequences too. Saskatchewan residents rely on our services. For many, quality of life and life itself depend on the care we provide.

There is another clear reality: vaccines work. They aren't a guarantee against COVID, but they exponentially reduce the chance of getting COVID. And even where there is a breakthrough case in someone who is fully vaccinated, those people are exponentially less likely to land in hospital or ICU.

With Saskatchewan opening up, vaccines are our primary tool available to us for reducing transmission and keeping COVID from exceeding our hospital capacity. Testing and contact tracing and the other elements of the offensive strategy are not enough, particularly in the fight against a COVID variant (Delta) that is more transmissible and is escalating pressure on our hospitals exponentially faster than in all previous waves.

So while we are in the process of making tough choices on health services, I want to expand on the choice being made by those who choose to continue to go unvaccinated.

Not only are they choosing to risk their own lives by going without the protection vaccines provide, they are risking the lives of those they love and those in their communities.

They are risking that ICU capacity will not be there for them when they get in a car accident and need it most.

They are risking the system being overwhelmed when they have a heart attack and need lifesaving support from our health care teams.

When someone chooses to go unvaccinated, they are putting themselves ahead of someone on our surgical waitlist, because in the days ahead the unrestrained spread of COVID among the unvaccinated will require us to slow down these types of services.

The unvaccinated are making a choice for all Saskatchewan residents. The unchecked spread of COVID among this population is escalating pressure on our hospitals and will result in Saskatchewan residents going without certain health services that they rely on to maintain their quality of life.

Physicians, nurses and the other skilled health professionals we rely on are a finite resource. As cases, hospitalizations and ICU admissions escalate, there is a risk we will fully expend their capacity. When that occurs, the unvaccinated will be making a choice for you about whether you will receive the high quality, lifesaving supports you are entitled to as a Canadian citizen.



As we make tough choices in the days ahead, remind your friends, peers and those in your community about who really made this choice. And ask everyone you know to get vaccinated so the choices don't get tougher in the weeks ahead.

*Scott Livingstone, President and CEO, SHA*

### **| COVID-19 | Dr. Susan Shaw – Fourth Wave Triggering Staff Burnout**

*Dr. Susan Shaw is the chief medical officer for the Saskatchewan Health Authority and an intensive care unit doctor.*

Like many of you I was holding out hope that by this point in the pandemic, we would be through the worst and our lives would be somewhat returning to some form of “normal.”

We saw glimmers of this only last month. But since then, the Delta variant has gained a firm foothold in our province. It spreads quicker and makes people sicker than the original COVID-19 strain. Between the first week of July and the last week of September, the number of new cases rose from a weekly average of 28 to a weekly average 350 – a 1,150 per cent increase. Over the same time, hospitalizations and ICU occupancy due to COVID have tripled!

We've seen COVID-19 cases rise before, throughout the previous three waves of the pandemic. But this time it's different. It's preventable. Vaccine is widely available and effective. Two doses of the vaccine combined with masking, distancing and hand hygiene and we are well positioned to control the virus.



*A COVID-19 patient is cared for by members of the care team in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at a Saskatchewan ICU this week. Photo by Dr. Susan Shaw.*

The solution seems simple to many of us: just roll up your sleeves.

This is why so many of us are perplexed and frustrated by the hundreds of thousands of people in Saskatchewan who choose to remain unvaccinated, risking very real, sometimes deadly, consequences.

We see these people in intensive care every day. They're fighting for their lives. Some make it. Sadly, some don't. Ninety-five per cent of ICU admissions in July were among those who were unvaccinated or partially vaccinated, and 100 per cent of deaths were among the unvaccinated. In August, over 85 per cent of ICU admissions were unvaccinated or partially

vaccinated, and 12 of the 22 people who died in August were unvaccinated.

Their suffering is real and, for those with regrets, their remorse is heartbreaking. Some ask, “Can you make sure my family gets their vaccine.” Most, however, can no longer tell us how they feel because they are so breathless they can't



talk. Like many of my colleagues, I've also looked after people who didn't think COVID-19 was a real disease, those who were vaccine hesitant because they had unanswered questions and those who weren't able to access the vaccine.

We are not here to judge. We are here to help – helping others is why I and my colleagues became health-care professionals. But this wave of the pandemic is testing our resolve. Front-line health care workers are beyond tired. We're frustrated, angry, worried and sad. What I'm seeing among many of us, and I'm paying attention to myself, too, is compassion fatigue.

Our emotional and physical tanks are close to empty and there's no time to refuel and regenerate.

Burnout is real and it's concerning. Staff who experience burnout are not fully present, not as able to do their work and, as a result, less safe. Some of us are leaving our chosen professions and others are retiring early to escape the stress. This is a genuine worry for us.

We have strategies within the health care system and the health authority is focused on providing essential supports. This is needed. What we also need is to tackle the root cause – our province's low rate of vaccination.

We are here for you when you need us. We need you to be here for us, too. Please do your part to stop this preventable virus. If you have questions, talk to your family physician or care provider. Practice masking and infection and prevention measures and, above all, get vaccinated.

## **| COVID-19 | Encouraging COVID-19 Vaccinations through Voice Calls**

The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA), Indigenous Services Canada, Northern InterTribal Health Authority and First Nations Partners will be using an auto-notification system through a phased approach starting on Sept. 8, 2021 to help increase awareness and vaccine uptake in residents across Saskatchewan. The first phase of the project will use voice call messages to send one notification per household, beginning with 2,000 Northern Saskatchewan residents, aged 12 years old and over to increase awareness about the importance of COVID-19 vaccinations.

It is important, now more than ever, to help protect those who have a high risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 and may want to receive a vaccine but due to health conditions are not able to, such as those who are most vulnerable, including children 11 years old and under and those living and working in congregate settings.

Auto-notification is a timely and cost effective way to reach Saskatchewan residents, especially those who may want to become vaccinated for COVID-19 or have questions regarding the vaccines.

These messages will be easily identifiable as coming from the Saskatchewan Health Authority and its partners with the identifier telephone number 306 655-4603 for voice call messages.

This system will not require or ask for any financial information or ask for any personal information.

Vaccination is safe and effective, and will protect you and your family from COVID-19 and emerging variants of concern.



All of the vaccines being administered are safe and approved by Health Canada for use.

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccine auto-notification system please visit [saskatchewan.ca/COVID19](https://saskatchewan.ca/COVID19).

## **/ COVID-19 / COVID-19 Update: Adopting Modified Approach to Case and Contact Investigations due to Surging Case Numbers**

Positive COVID-19 cases are surging, as well as the number of close contacts being identified by cases. This surge combined with limited public health resources has resulted in significantly increased workloads for our staff.

The Saskatchewan Health Authority's Public Health Communicable Disease (CD) teams are adopting a modified approach to COVID-19 case and contact investigations. As a result, COVID-19 positive persons will be supported to notify their own close contacts.

Public Health will:

Quickly notify persons testing positive for COVID-19 and provide isolation education.

Educate persons testing positive for COVID-19 on who is a close contact and what information to provide to their close contacts.

Identify persons testing positive in healthcare settings (healthcare workers and inpatients), vulnerable populations, long term care facilities and other high risk congregate living settings to prioritize investigation in these settings so that outbreak prevention and control measures can be put into action quickly.

This modified approach will focus our staff efforts on case and contact management in at risk settings. The Saskatchewan Health Authority and Ministry of Health are working together to review the protocols around school case management and contact tracing.

## **/ COVID-19 / You asked, we answered**

**Question:** I am seeing fully vaccinated people getting COVID-19. Should I still get vaccinated?

**Answer:** Yes get vaccinated! Vaccination is not a cure for COVID-19, but it is your BEST defence. In July 2021, unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people accounted for 90% of all new cases and hospitalizations, 95% of ICU admissions, and 100% of COVID-19 related deaths in Saskatchewan. COVID-19 remains in our province and our communities. In order to protect yourself, those you love and those who can't vaccinate, public health advice continues to be get fully vaccinated as soon as possible and wash your hands regularly. Additional actions you can take are wear a face mask in public spaces where physical distancing isn't possible and don't share food/drink.



## **| COVID-19 | Test to Protect – Self-Testing for Schools**

With children returning back to school, the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) is offering COVID-19 self-testing (rapid antigen) kits to families with students under the age of 12 years old who are unable to be vaccinated.

Schools selected by the school divisions and Medical Health Officers (MHOs) are being offered the opportunity to participate in this testing initiative as part of a pilot program with the SHA's *Test to Protect* strategy. Families in these schools that wish to participate will be able to pick up a self-testing kit, complete with information on how to use the kit, at their school. Families can then use the kits to conduct regular routine testing on each member of the household.

Self-testing is safe, easy to use, provides fast results within 15 minutes, and most importantly, is gentle. They can also be done almost anywhere, at any time to see if you may have COVID-19. Weekly self-testing is used as a screening tool and is recommended for individuals who do not have COVID-19 related symptoms.

Twenty-four schools from across the province have been selected to participate in the pilot and more schools will be offered the opportunity to participate as the program evolves.

For more information, please visit [Self-Testing in Schools](#) on the Government of Saskatchewan's COVID-19 webpage.

## **| COVID-19 | Mask Requirements Change for Family/Visitors in Long Term Care**

With increasing COVID cases in Saskatchewan, and in an effort to minimize the risk of COVID transmission in long-term care facilities, starting **Friday, Sept. 10**, the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) is making masks mandatory outside of residents' rooms for family and visitors. This masking protocol will apply to both SHA long-term care homes and affiliates, and applies to both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

While it is not required, the SHA also **strongly recommends that family and visitors wear a mask within the resident's individual room**. This will provide additional protection for all our residents during this fourth wave facing our province.

Residents are not required but are strongly encouraged to wear a mask outside of their room, particularly if the resident is not fully vaccinated.

## **| COVID-19 | In Case You Missed It:**

### **Dr. Kevin Wasko on Patients Taking Out Frustration on Staff**

Dr. Kevin Wasko appeared on The Morning Edition – Sask with Stefani Langenegger on CBC Radio on Tuesday, September 7. He asks patients to stop 'taking out their frustrations' on health care workers while dealing with a system overwhelmed by COVID-19. [Listen on the CBC website](#).



### Derek Miller on the Current State of the Healthcare System

This morning, Derek Miller, commander of pandemic emergency operations for the Saskatchewan Health Authority, joined CKOM/CJME's John Gormley to discuss hospitalizations numbers and pressures and outline the current state of our health system and how we are trying to manage what is to come. Listen to the interview on the [CKOM website under On Demand](#).

### **/COVID-19/ QUICK LINKS:**

[Public Health Orders  
Testing Information](#)

[Vaccine Update  
SHA News Stories](#)