

MEDIA RELEASE

Pediatricians gravely concerned for children as province eliminates COVID restrictions and testing in the community

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ALBERTA – The executive members of the Alberta Medical Association’s Section of Pediatrics sent a letter to Premier Kenney today expressing their grave concern regarding Alberta’s plan to eliminate COVID-19 testing in the community, contact tracing and mandatory isolation this month. Pediatricians say that the removal of monitoring measures, combined with the recent removal of public health restrictions such as the mask mandate, will further accelerate the spread of the Delta variant – which is already growing exponentially in Alberta.

Dr. Michelle Bailey, President of the Section of Pediatrics said, “Evidence shows that the Delta variant is more contagious than seasonal influenza and spreads as easily as the chicken pox virus. Over 1.5 million Albertans remain unvaccinated and over half a million children under 12 are still ineligible for the vaccine, which leaves us far from reaching herd immunity and nowhere near the endemic phase of COVID-19.”

Vaccine trials in children under 12 years old are underway and vaccines for this age group will likely be approved in the next six months, but pediatricians say that in the meantime it is imperative that we continue to protect our children and vulnerable populations with other risk mitigation measures.

Testing, tracing, and isolating are the tenets of disease control in public health and are supported by national and international organizations including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Section of Pediatrics is concerned that there is no scientific basis to abandon these measures during the start of a fourth wave of the pandemic. They point out that the CDC recently reversed their indoor mask policy, stating that children and fully vaccinated individuals should be wearing masks indoors in areas of high COVID transmission.

The letter to the Premier outlines the many reasons why pediatricians are so concerned for the health of children and their families, including the fact that high numbers of COVID-19 infections in children translate to higher numbers of children who develop serious illness such as Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in children (MIS-C) or severe COVID-19 pneumonia.

Dr. Tehseen Ladha, Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Alberta and an executive member of the AMA’s Section of Pediatrics said, “There are lessons to be learned from other jurisdictions, such as Florida and Louisiana, who have also abandoned their protective measures and as a result are now seeing rapid increases in pediatric hospitalizations. As we near the start of the school year, the relaxed public health measures will result in a fourth wave where COVID-19 will spread quickly throughout unvaccinated populations and children. This poses a high risk to children and families. We are asking the government to continue with strong public health measures until we have either reached herd immunity (85% of Albertans immunized) or the endemic phase of COVID-19. We



don't want to see any more of our young patients getting sick. They are vulnerable and it is our job to protect them.”

The AMA's Section of Pediatrics represents over 300 members of the Alberta Medical Association who practice pediatric medicine. Pediatricians play a critical role in advocating for our patients and our health care system.

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Contact Information:

Dr. J. A. Michelle Bailey, MSc., MD, FRCPC

President, AMA Section of Pediatrics

Quality and Safety Lead, Hospital Pediatrics, Department of Pediatrics

Assistant Dean, Physician Learning Program (PLP) Medical Director, Quality and Practice Improvement, PLP and CME and Professional Development

Cumming's School of Medicine Clinical Associate Professor, U. of Calgary

Michelle.Bailey@albertahealthservices.ca

Dr. Tehseen Ladha, MD, MPH, FRCPC

Executive Member, AMA Section of Pediatrics

Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of Alberta

tehseen@ualberta.ca

Dr Sidd Thakore, MSc., MD, FRCPC

Treasurer, AMA Section of Pediatrics

Medical Directory ACH Follow Up clinic, Section of Hospital Pediatrics, Alberta Children's Hospital

Clinical Assistant Professor, University of Calgary

President, Canadian Pediatrics Society Section of Hospital Pediatrics

sidd.thakore@albertahealthservices.ca