

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Blaine Higgs, M.L.A.
Premier of New Brunswick
premier@gnb.ca

Dear Premier,

Re: Paid time off for COVID-19 vaccination

Unifor represents hundreds of thousands of members across the country, including countless heroes on the frontlines of the pandemic, some of whom have tragically succumbed to COVID-19. We understand firsthand how important it is to accelerate current vaccination efforts to protect Canadian workers and place our economy back on solid footing. Paid vaccine leave must be a part of the equation if we are to overcome this pandemic as soon as possible.

As vaccination efforts ramp up across the country amidst a third wave of the pandemic, it has become increasingly apparent that there will need to be a drastic increase in the number of daily doses administered in order to meet federal and provincial vaccination targets by the end of summer. We are concerned that as the eligibility criteria for vaccines are expanded, barriers to accessing vaccination – particularly for employees without paid leave – will become even more pressing and potentially hamper vaccination efforts.

Recent reports have suggested that some regions across the country have had difficulty filling vaccination appointments among the first cohorts of eligible recipients over 60, many of them retirees. While some of this is due to vaccine hesitancy, problems of accessibility – especially among marginalized communities and those who speak English as a second or third language – are undoubtedly playing a major role.

These issues around accessibility will only be compounded as younger cohorts become eligible but find themselves unable to access vaccination sites during working hours due to employment obligations. Restricting workers to getting vaccinated during off hours is unjust and will undoubtedly slow down the overall rate of vaccination among Canadians, unnecessarily dragging out the pandemic.

Premier, we urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that Canadians are able to receive their COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they are eligible by mandating that employees be provided paid time off for the purposes of getting vaccinated. Workers should not be in the position of having to choose between receiving a potentially life-saving vaccine at the earliest

opportunity and their jobs. With so many Canadians facing critical financial conditions due to the pandemic, money should not be a barrier to immunization.

We also reiterate our call to immediately legislate paid sick days so that workers who contract COVID-19 can stay home and quarantine without fear of financial penalty. There is now indisputable evidence across the country that essential frontline workers who cannot access paid sick leave account for a growing proportion of severe COVID-19 cases, often requiring hospitalization and intensive care. Both paid vaccine leave and sick days are urgently needed to avoid stretching our healthcare resources beyond their limits. They must be implemented without delay.

Sincerely,



Jerry Dias
National President



Linda MacNeil
Atlantic Regional Director

cc: L. Payne

JD/klcpe343