

Stronger COVID Guidelines Welcome

Regina – Yesterday the Government of Saskatchewan announced new public health measures to combat rapidly-rising COVID numbers. Most notably, masks must now be worn in all communities, private gatherings are now limited to 5 people instead of 10, and visits to care home residents will be allowed only for compassionate reasons. Restaurants, bars, gyms, and places of worship will remain open, but these groups will be consulted to develop safer practices. Premier Scott Moe described these measures as “not a lockdown” but rather a “one-month slowdown” in hopes of flattening the COVID curve enough to permit Christmas gatherings.

SEIU-West welcomes these measures, but is concerned they don't do enough to acknowledge and relieve the additional burdens health sector workers have faced, and will increasingly face during this second wave of the pandemic.

“We welcome the province-wide mask order,” says Barb Cape, President of SEIU-West. “We hope this is a signal that the Government is listening to the voices of health care providers. The virus doesn't check what a town's population is before dropping by. Restrictions on family gatherings are important, but not having similar restrictions on restaurants, bars, athletic/recreation activities, and church services allows for another vector for infection and spread of this dangerous virus.”

“It's incredibly unfortunate that we've had to move to restricting visitors to long-term care and personal care homes,” Cape continues. “If anyone understands the impact this has on residents and their families, it is health care staff. The challenge now is for health care staff to keep residents active, engaged and happy. Given the chronic understaffing that prevails in long term care, this becomes a challenge exclusively for health care staff.”

Cape calls for the Saskatchewan government to offer a temporary wage subsidy to all health care workers. “Premier Moe confirmed in the media conference yesterday that our government is sitting on tens of millions in unused federal COVID funding. Now is the right time to draw on that for the benefit of those who are on the front line fighting COVID in the hospitals, LTC/personal care homes, home care, and community based organizations. Our members are exhausted - workloads have ballooned, emotional and physical burdens have taken a toll, and the stress caused by this pandemic continues to be overwhelming. It is time for a show of real appreciation for the front line faced with COVID and its impact on the health care system. At the same time, relief is necessary - we would encourage a slowdown in SHA services in order to provide a moment for the health care system to regain a sense of equilibrium in labs, hospital services, ICU's/COVID units, and in long term care.”

Service Employees International Union West (SEIU-West) represents over 13,000 people across Saskatchewan. They include people who work in health care, education, municipalities, community-based organizations, retirement homes and other sectors. They are joined by one colour – purple – and one union – SEIU-West. Visit PurpleWorks.ca to find out more about SEIU-West members.

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