

Relaxed Rules Disrespectful of Health Care Providers

Saskatoon – On the heels of Premier Scott Moe’s announcement that public health restrictions will be relaxed, SEIU-West members and leaders are concerned that this decision is premature and guided by politics rather than science or the needs of our health care system.

“It’s too soon to let our guard down like this,” says Barb Cape, President of SEIU-West. “The signs that the second wave is subsiding aren’t strong enough to justify relaxing restrictions. With the rise of the variants and lower testing numbers, we need to keep our public health restrictions in place for just a little longer to see if our efforts are really working.”

Two of Saskatchewan’s key health system leaders, Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Saqib Shahab and Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) CEO Scott Livingstone, both expressed concern about the impending risk of a third wave of hospitalizations, especially among younger people and those unvaccinated.

“Ignoring the advice of two of your top advisors doesn’t seem like a sound way to go about protecting the people you were elected to serve,” adds Cape. “There are still a lot of unknowns about the variants and how quickly vaccines will be put into people’s arms.”

Experts agree that caution is key for the next 8 to 12 weeks based on the experience of jurisdictions in Europe noting that there is still potential that another wave would overwhelm our health care system.

“With the recent warmer weather, we’re already seeing a bit of a ‘spring fever’ effect and people are itching to push the envelope. We understand,” continues Cape. “But loosening Saskatchewan restrictions now will encourage folks to take risks... and in a couple of weeks, the heat will be back on again in our ICUs and acute care units. Let’s remember the restrictions in our province remain the most moderate in the country.”

Though Saskatchewan’s rate of COVID hospitalizations has fallen to levels not seen since Christmas, they are still the highest per capita in Canada, and the number of COVID patients in our ICUs remains high.

“Our acute care members have spent a year keeping our health care system running throughout this pandemic,” adds Cape. “And we still have 40% of the health care team who haven’t received their first dose of vaccine. A decision to relax restrictions will lead to a rise in cases and another crisis in our health care system.”

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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