



CANADIAN SOCIETY OF RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS

SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DES THÉRAPEUTES RESPIRATOIRES

Position Statement on Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination for Respiratory Therapists

Preamble

Due to its high transmissibility and high rates of infection and hospitalization, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to put significant stress on the Canadian healthcare system¹, on the Canadian economy² and on the physical and mental health of both healthcare providers^{3,4} and members of the public⁵. Despite population wide vaccination efforts, highly contagious COVID-19 variants continue to evolve and are responsible for alarming rates of infection in Canada and globally.

The ongoing nature of the pandemic is characterized by outbreaks across Canada and increasing transmissibility of emerging variant strains.

The COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada have been demonstrated to be safe and effective^{6,10}. Despite pro-vaccination advice from medical and public health agencies, there remains vaccine hesitancy among some healthcare providers⁸ and some members of the public. Vaccination of respiratory therapists and other healthcare providers is an important means of reducing the spread and severity of COVID-19 infection and therefore represents an important measure to limit the impacts of COVID-19.

Position

As COVID-19 vaccines have been demonstrated to be safe and as they are effective in reducing the spread and impact of COVID-19 infections, they should be mandated for respiratory therapists and other healthcare providers.

Recommendations

1. COVID-19 vaccination should be a mandatory requirement for respiratory therapists and other healthcare providers unless there is a documented medical reason why an individual cannot be vaccinated.
2. Measures should be in place to address vaccine hesitancy among respiratory therapy and healthcare provider staff.
3. Measures should be in place to address system barriers that could impede or interfere with access to COVID-19 vaccination.
4. Other infection prevention and control measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 should be followed as recommended by IPAC units.
5. Factors that put respiratory therapists and other healthcare providers at risk of contracting COVID-19 must be addressed, and vaccination must not be used as a rationale for not doing so. Such factors include, but are not limited to insufficient building ventilation, lack of access to appropriate PPE (e.g., N-95 masks) when a point of care risk assessment indicates it is required.

Rationale

Although developed more rapidly than has been the case for previous vaccines, COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada have undergone the same vigorous review and met the same approval requirements as other medications and vaccines¹⁰. Furthermore, they have been demonstrated to be safe and effective¹⁰ (including against current variants of concern¹¹).

More than 90,000 health care workers have contracted COVID-19 and infection rates have increased by almost 50% in the first half of 2021¹². Vaccination against COVID-19 can reduce the severity of illness¹³, transmission within healthcare facilities¹⁴ and to household contacts¹⁵. Given that the Canadian healthcare system relies on healthy practitioners to provide care, protecting healthcare providers is an important step in maintaining healthcare delivery.

Respiratory therapists have the duty to do no harm, a professional responsibility to put the needs of those they care for above their own and should adhere to evidence informed practice⁹. Similar expectations exist for other healthcare providers¹⁶. Consistent with the widely accepted ethical principles of *Do No Harm* and *Duty to Care*, precedents for mandated vaccines targeting other pathogens can be found in admission requirements to healthcare education programs and in conditions for employment in the healthcare field.

Vaccinated individuals are less likely to transmit the virus than non-vaccinated individuals¹⁷. Thus, respiratory therapists and healthcare providers who receive the COVID-19 vaccine protect themselves, their patients and their families. Vaccination does not provide complete protection against transmission of the virus, therefore adherence to other infection prevention and control measures is essential.

Vaccination is one measure to mitigate the transmission and clinical impact of COVID-19, but it must be used along with other measures to best control transmission. These measures must be appropriate to the healthcare setting and include screening, adequate ventilation and adherence to appropriate transmission precautions¹⁸. Vaccination does not replace these other approaches, but is a key component of the range of measures that together optimize infection prevention and control, and save lives

About the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT)

The CSRT is the national professional association representing respiratory therapists across Canada. The CSRT promotes the respiratory therapy profession at the national and international level and is the credentialing agency for respiratory therapists who practice in non-regulated jurisdictions in Canada.

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