

MEDIA RELEASE

More measures needed to protect Alberta's children during respiratory virus season

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ALBERTA – In light of the impact of this severe viral season on Alberta's children, and in the context of the heavy strain on pediatric health services, the executive members of the Alberta Medical Association's Section of Pediatrics are calling for stronger protective health measures to mitigate viral transmission.

As per the Immunization Monitoring Program Active (IMACT) network, the number of weekly influenza-associated pediatric hospitalizations in Canada is already higher than levels typically seen at the peak of the influenza season and Alberta currently has the highest influenza activity in Canada. RSV activity is also higher than average within Canada this year, and rates of RSV-associated hospitalizations in children have increased in the U.S. compared to pre-pandemic years.

Dr. Tehseen Ladha, executive member of the AMA's Section of Pediatrics said, "COVID-19 continues to contribute to pediatric hospitalizations, with three times more children in the 1-9 year age group admitted to hospital with COVID-19 in the first eight months of 2022 than in the entire 20 months prior. That is why we are recommending immediate mitigation measures."

Some of the recommended measures include:

- Increased public messaging around the safety and efficacy of influenza and COVID-19 vaccines in children to create awareness of their importance in decreasing severe outcomes/hospitalization.
- Increased accessibility to vaccines, especially amongst marginalized populations by offering school vaccine clinics or mobile vaccine services.
- A temporary mask requirement in schools for children and educators with provision of high-quality medical grade masks.
- Approval and support of the placement of HEPA purifiers in school classrooms.
- Increased messaging around optimizing ventilation and filtration when having indoor gatherings by opening windows or using HEPA purifiers when feasible.
- Encouragement of frequent hand washing, access to sanitizer and sanitization of high-touch surfaces in schools and essential indoor public spaces.
- Increased messaging around staying home from work and school when sick.

Dr. Kyle McKenzie, also an executive member of the AMA's Section of Pediatrics, talks about how the additional measures could provide some much needed relief, "These protections will help decrease the spread of multiple viral illnesses, including RSV, influenza and COVID-19, that are increasing at alarming rates in our community and leading to increased school absenteeism as well as unprecedented wait times in Emergency Departments and overcapacity pediatric inpatient and outpatient units throughout the province."



The pediatricians have indicated that temporary masking requirements for children that they are calling for could be implemented immediately, but then reassessed after the peak of the respiratory virus season later this winter.

Dr. Sam Wong, president of the AMA's Section of Pediatrics adds, "Given that vaccines decrease the chance of severe outcomes and hospitalizations in children, we are urging public health officials to provide increased messaging around the safety and efficacy of both influenza and COVID-19 vaccines for children, and to ensure accessibility to these vaccines for all populations."

The pediatricians agree that these steps are necessary to optimize the quality and timeliness of care for all pediatric patients.

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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