

September 15, 2022

The Honourable Doug Ford

Premier of Ontario
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs
Main Legislative Bldg Rm 223, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A4

The Honourable Sylvia Jones

Minister of Health
Deputy Premier
438 University Ave, 8th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Re: Addressing the Backlog of Routine Immunizations

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Jones,

We appreciate the efforts your government has taken to address historical issues within Ontario's health care system, recognizing that a healthy population is fundamental to a healthy economy. Today, we are writing on behalf of our organizations to request urgent action on the backlog of routine immunizations.

Recent polling conducted by Campaign Research in July 2022 indicates that 1 out of 5 Ontarians have missed or delayed their routine immunization(s), with another 15-18 percent unsure if they have missed a vaccine.¹ **This means there are 2.5 to 3.5 million Ontarians that may have missed their routine immunizations.**

With a rise in ailments such as polio and m-pox, and recent events, including the 7,858 suspension orders issued to local high school students by the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit over incomplete immunization records, our organizations are deeply concerned with the drastic drop in routine immunizations across all ages in Ontario, as well as lower vaccination rates during the last influenza season. This is all combined with recent data showing that **1 out of every 10 Ontario residents does not have a family doctor to consult on these important health issues.**²

Uptake of routine and seasonal vaccinations critical to preventing severe illness, including cancers, has declined precipitously. For instance, Public Health Ontario³ reports that from 2017-18 to 2020-21, we have seen coverage of school-based vaccines decline sharply from:

- Human papillomavirus vaccine: 59.9% → 0.8%
- Hepatitis B vaccine: 69.2% → 16.8%
- Conjugated meningitis vaccine: 82.4% → 17.3%

¹ <https://www.campaignresearch.com/single-post/gsk-immunization-study-july-2022>

² <https://www.campaignresearch.com/single-post/gsk-immunization-study-july-2022>

School-based programs are not the only routine vaccinations on decline. Preventative vaccinations for seniors, such as shingles and pneumonia, have had an almost 50 percent decline⁴ since the start of the pandemic, as doctors moved many of their appointments online.

Access is one of the primary contributors to declining vaccination rates. Ontarians would welcome expanded access points. In fact, **62 percent of Ontario adults said they would be interested in receiving their routine immunizations along with their next COVID-19 booster or flu vaccine** instead of making multiple appointments.⁵

To address the backlog of routine immunizations, we recommend the Ontario government:

- Improve access points for vaccination by leveraging existing immunization infrastructure, including school and community-based programs, primary care, and pharmacy-based clinics.
 - COVID-19 vaccines were available in multiple locations for Ontarians (including pharmacies) and are necessary to catch-up the province's population with their routine immunizations.
- Adopt vaccination targets and monitor to drive improvements.
- Invest in technology integration to create a centralized electronic immunization registry that would be accessible to all health care providers, leveraging the success and integration of the COVax system.
- Implement a communication strategy building on the effective messages regarding the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. The province needs a strong communications plan to drive awareness of missed routine immunizations and to guide Ontarians on how to get their vaccines up to date.

The Ontario government's *Plan to Stay Open: Health System Stability* is a testament to its commitment to building the health care system of tomorrow. We see expanded access to routine immunizations for all Ontarians as the first step in building this system, and one that can be implemented right away by leveraging existing infrastructure. Most importantly, it keeps Ontarians healthy and out of hospitals.

In summary, we urge your government to immediately begin communications with Ontarians on the need to obtain all their vaccinations, to create a provincial immunization registry, and provide pharmacies with expanded access to deliver a range of routine immunizations. This simple but impactful approach will ensure all Ontarians receive the health care they deserve, protect the province's most vulnerable populations, strengthen our health care system, and support the well-being of our workforce and broader economy.

Sincerely,



Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce



⁴ GSK Data on file

⁵ <https://www.campaignresearch.com/single-post/gsk-immunization-study-july-2022>

Jia Hu, MD MSc CCFP FRCPC
Chief Executive Officer
19 To Zero (www.19tozero.ca)



Justin Bates,
Chief Executive Officer
Ontario Pharmacist Association



Ranya El Masri,
Vice President, Government
Affairs & Market Access
GlaxoSmithKline Canada



Dr. Jason Field
President and CEO
Life Sciences Ontario, and
Chair of Steering
Committee
Resilient Health Coalition



Jean-Pierre Baylet
General Manager, Vaccines Canada
Sanofi



Sandra Hanna,
Chief Executive Officer
Neighbourhood Pharmacy
Association of Canada



Jeff Leger,
President
Shoppers Drug Mart



Laura Tamblyn Watts,
President and CEO
CanAge



Anthony Leong, MBA, B.Sc.Pharm, R.Ph
Vice President, Public Policy & Government Affairs
McKesson Canada



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Najah Sampson,
President,
Pfizer Canada ULC



Marwan Akar
President and Managing Director
Merck Canada



CC:
Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore