

December 20, 2022

Honorable Danielle Smith
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Hon. Jason Copping
Minister of Health
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Dr. Mark Joffe
Chief Medical Officer of Health
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Dear Premier Smith, Minister Copping, CMOH Joffe:

Alberta's hospitals are in crisis now. This is not a warning, a possibility, or a projection. The rapid spread of infectious respiratory diseases occurring throughout Alberta is having a critical impact now. As you must know, the crisis is particularly severe in children's hospitals and pediatric care.

As of December 10, the Alberta Government's own statistics showed more than 1,400 Albertans were hospitalized with influenza, 140 in intensive care. As of December 12 there were 992 Albertans hospitalized with COVID-19, 32 of them in ICU.

More robust reporting of influenza, COVID and RSV statistics is important to Albertans understanding the severity and the critical impacts on staffing of this situation.

This morning, Alberta Health Services said the Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton is at 100 per cent capacity. Physicians are working extra shifts. Members of United Nurses of Alberta have been told they will be impacted by such staffing measures as mandatory overtime, schedule changes on short notice, and cancellation of staff vacations. There is no guarantee these actions will be enough to ease the problems in pediatric health care, let alone solve them.

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Premier Smith, Minister Copping, CMOH Joffe:

For the sake of Alberta's children, and all Albertans, it is imperative that our government cease treating this situation as if it were a political inconvenience and address it immediately as the public health crisis that it is.

The simplest and most effective policy change that could be implemented immediately would be an indoor mask mandate to reduce the spread of influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). However, even a strong statement acknowledging that wearing masks in indoor public spaces and limiting the size and number of public gatherings attended this holiday season could have a beneficial impact.

Another measure that could help would be for the Chief Medical Officer of Health to make a public appearance and a statement on the gravity of the situation facing the province's health care facilities, especially pediatric care facilities right now.

I implore you to do the responsible thing and act. Now is not the time to put politics ahead of our children's and seniors' health.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'H'.

Heather Smith
President
United Nurses of Alberta