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February 16, 2021

Hon. Jason Kenney  
Premier

307 Legislature Building  
10800 – 97 Avenue NW  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

[premier@gov.ab.ca](mailto:premier@gov.ab.ca)

Dear Premier Kenney,

Alberta's nurses are deeply concerned by the potential for a third wave of COVID-19 in light of your government's decision to loosen restrictions on many businesses and sports and social activities just as new variant strains of the coronavirus begin to appear in Western Canada.

Members of United Nurses of Alberta, which as you know represents most Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses working in Alberta, are deeply concerned by the warnings of many epidemiologists that there is likely to be a third wave this spring caused by the new coronavirus variants first observed in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil, all of which have now been identified in Canada.

Some epidemiologists have forecasted that if allowed to spread, the more-infectious and possibly more lethal B117 variant will quickly become the dominant strain in Alberta, possibly as soon as early March. Dr. Gosia Gasperowicz, the University of Calgary biologist, has predicted this would result in the new daily count of COVID-19 infections returning to the 2,000 range by the beginning of April.

Clearly that would push Alberta back into a situation requiring the reimposition of more severe restrictions than the last short period of stricter measures.

Moreover, there is a general consensus among health care professionals that such a third wave would have the potential to push our health care system to the brink.

Our members are already exhausted and overwhelmed by what has happened to date. While we are proud of their courage and determination, we also recognize that many are now approaching their limits. These front-line workers are the greatest asset our health care system has. We must protect them if we are to protect all Albertans – and that must be part of our decisions of how we respond to the pandemic.

So I am writing today to urge you and your government in light of the evolving scientific understanding to take a more cautious approach to easing pandemic restrictions until sufficient numbers of Albertans have been vaccinated and COVID-19 is trending downward.

I also encourage you not to rely solely on hospitalization rates, as you have indicated Alberta is doing, to determine the speed at which Alberta can reopen. Rates of hospitalization and ICU occupancy are lagging indicators, not very useful for predicting what is about to happen. All measures – including R-value, positivity rates and new cases – should be driving our decisions about how much and how quickly to return to normal business.

In addition, UNA also urges the Alberta Government to permit the use of the federal COVID-19 tracing app given the high percentage of cases in Alberta that have no known source.

UNA believes that with a successful vaccination program and measures to avoid successive waves that will push us backward, the time will come soon for the economy to fully reopen.

Hurrying to reopen before sufficient numbers of Albertans have been vaccinated is a high-risk strategy that could result in increasing the time that restrictions are required, damaging the economy further, and raising the number of deaths and illnesses from COVID-19 and suffering by Albertans denied access to other medical procedures and economic and social stresses.

Please act with that risk in mind.

Yours very sincerely,

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