

For Immediate Release

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NLTA RESPONDS TO MANDATORY VACCINATION POLICY AND DISCONNECT WITH RULES FOR NON-ESSENTIAL ACCESS TO SCHOOLS

St. John's... In the context of a global pandemic and ongoing state of Public Health emergency due to COVID-19, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association supports, in principle, a reasonable application of government's mandatory vaccination policy for public sector workers. The Association sees the importance of such a move as it relates to the challenges associated with the safe operation of schools, the importance of public education in the lives of children, and recognizing that schools are places where large numbers of students and staff interact.

"The NLTA continues to advocate for our members and an approach that errs on the side of caution and safety for everyone who learns and works in our schools," said NLTA President Trent Langdon. "With respect to mandatory vaccination for NLTA members, the Association was engaged in consultation with the government prior to the announcement and we made it quite clear that if government was moving forward with mandatory vaccines for public service workers, specifically NLTA members, the details around exemptions and accommodations would be critical. We will provide support to NLTA members who are not able to be vaccinated and will be monitoring closely to see that the policy is operationalized and applied reasonably and consistently, in compliance with the provincial Human Rights Act and our collective agreements, and that regular review of the policy occurs."

The vaccine mandate is a response to very unique circumstances and it should therefore not be assumed to be a long-term measure, but one that is temporary and subject to timely review and revision given the evolving and dynamic nature of the pandemic. The NLTA does not support the imposition of disciplinary measures for non-compliance and maintains that this policy should be complementary to, not a replacement or pre-emption of other proven, available and less intrusive Public Health precautions.

"We have heard repeatedly that keeping our schools safe and sustaining in-person learning is a priority for Public Health and government, and that the vaccine mandate and NLVaxPass system are 'tools in the toolbox' to encourage and increase vaccination rates and overall safety," said President Langdon. "So a significant question for us is why Public Health and government have chosen to exempt non-essential school sponsored recreational activities for vaccine eligible students from all proof of vaccination requirements? Why is it not just as important to encourage vaccination among 12-18 year olds, to increase protections for them and the front-line teachers who volunteer their time, efforts and talents to provide extra-curricular opportunities for students? Once again we are seeing a lower standard of Public Health protocols applied in our schools compared to what is required for other settings, and this disconnect in government messaging is both disappointing and concerning. Thousands of people pass through our schools each day to access essential K-12 public education. Extra-curricular activities include students from different cohorts and often bring large groups of students and adult volunteers together from various schools, communities and regions for extended periods of indoor activity. We should not lose sight of this reality when decisions are made regarding Public Health 'tools' intended to boost vaccination rates, increase safety, and ensure, as much as possible, the stability and continuity of in-person schooling."

The NLTA maintains that government needs to do everything in its power to ensure a safe learning and working environment for students, staff and families in our school communities.

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