

A discussion about vaccination at HHS

What do doctors think?

The MSA conducted a recent one question survey of MDs.

1050 emails were sent out on September 7th with one reminder on September 9th and the survey was closed at 7pm on September 10th.

Over these 4 days, there were 470 responses (44.76%) with 436 responses (92.77%) indicating support for mandatory vaccination and 34 responses (7.23%) indicating that some doctors prefer personal choice. We believe that most of these doctors would support the science showing that vaccination is beneficial.

Despite overwhelming MD support for mandatory vaccination for COVID-19, the issue still generates much discussion from those who work at this institution. There are clear benefits and repercussions for and against a policy of mandatory vaccination. Some hospitals immediately announced ultimatums for vaccinations. Our hospital opted to give unvaccinated staff time to adjust and to see for themselves that a) vaccination was in the interest of all and that b) a hospital has to ensure that those working there are vaccinated in accordance with [Directive #6](#).

Valid vaccination exemptions, though rare, will need to be respected in any policy. Our hospital has stated categorically that it would show such respect and support individuals who require an exemption with testing kits to be used twice/week, as per government decree.

What about disclosure?

In the first instance, disclosure of vaccination status, which is already mandatory as per the province, has not been uniform. Some MDs and hospital staff have not disclosed their status to Employee Health (Note, vaccination status is classified as personal information, so Employee Health treats this as confidential. But given the provincial mandate, Medical Affairs at the hospital is charged with ensuring that we meet Directive #6). The MSA urges all MDs to ensure that their status is disclosed to Employee Health in the manner requested. Due to a number of factors including historical processes, imprecise processes etc (people are now aware of this and are appropriately apologetic), please be aware that you may need to confirm your status if you see evidence that its correct disclosure is in question.

What about mandatory vaccination vs personal freedoms?

Societies, and the institutions within them, function with a balance of freedom and collaboration. Every society needs to establish policies and rules regarding issues that society in general considers important for safety and function; that's how societies define themselves and maintain integrity. None of us can enjoy the immense benefits of societal goods such as transportation without the maintenance of policies like driving on the right side of the road. The repercussion of not following this policy is an ambulance visit to the trauma bay at HGH—if you are lucky. Given the need to act collectively, though, our modern society also greatly values individual choice and freedoms. Without the protection of freedoms, much of what we have achieved and our hope for greater fairness, transparency and social responsibility will be lost. To be sure,

both the protection of freedom and the adherence to collective goods are all around us in our everyday lives and we count on this to lead the lives we enjoy.

So, there must be a balance. In a diverse society that values individual freedoms, everyone who enjoys the benefits of that society also has a duty to respect the rules and regulations upon which that society is built. Regarding mandatory vaccination, each of us has to decide whether the risk to their individual choice about this one thing is bigger than the risk to the safety of our colleagues, our patients and our society. Therefore, the decision here is not about freedom. It's about how and when to exercise it.

Does the hospital have a choice about mandatory vaccination? No, the hospital has no choice here (Directive # 6, Section 1). People are dying from COVID and vaccination is the strongest countermeasure. Make no mistake. While the hospital respects individual choice in many ways, it is a societal institution whose mandate is to preserve the health of our community and ensure sustainability of services. For instance, crucial services are so strapped right now that should several doctors in a division need to quarantine, our mandate to provide essential services will be impossible. So, mandatory vaccination is happening. And with it, processes to handle what a lack of vaccination means. Should you opt to remain unvaccinated, you will be presented with other choices based on the processes that the hospital develops. How this will be exercised is not yet known. For that reason, the MSA executive will follow the decisions made by the hospital and review its upcoming policies.

The MSA position on mandatory vaccination

The MSA executive committee held an emergency meeting on October 4th to discuss vaccination. Considering your replies to the survey as well as the discussion above, the following position was taken:

STATEMENT:

The MSA executive committee UNANIMOUSLY supports COVID-19 vaccination of all those working at HHS.

This reflects the position of the overwhelming majority of our members. Members can reach out to the MSA exec at MSA@HHSC.CA to express their views, to discuss this position or to seek assistance as they need.