



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEWS RELEASE

Saskatchewan's Frontline Workers Call on Government to Protect Vital Services

SASKATCHEWAN – Today, unions representing more than 113,000 Saskatchewan workers collectively call on the Government of Saskatchewan and Premier Scott Moe to immediately mandate the recommendations of the province's Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Saqib Shahab.

At a news conference on January 12, 2022, Dr. Shahab made strong recommendations as a result of the high number of COVID-19 cases and the rising number of hospitalizations.

Consequently, a number of organizations are calling on the government to implement these measures in an effort to slow the community spread of the virus and protect vital services and programs. Dr. Shahab's recommendations include:

- Limit gathering sizes to a maximum of 10 people.
- Limit the frequency of gatherings and establish a consistent "bubble."
- Limit non-school and non-work contacts.
- Limit non-essential travel between communities.



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The Saskatchewan government's failure to implement these recommendations as public health orders is leading to rampant community spread that is putting unprecedented strain on services Saskatchewan citizens rely on every day, including health care, education and community-based supports.

Each member organization is being inundated with calls from members who are experiencing first hand the impact of a lack of appropriate public health measures. Across sectors, frontline workers are reporting burnout and staffing shortages. They are operating in crisis mode and systems are not functioning as intended or designed, creating significant safety concerns. Concerns for health, safety and access to vital services are also growing beyond frontline workers; an Angus Reid poll released earlier this week found almost 59 percent of Saskatchewan residents are unhappy with Premier Moe's handling of the pandemic.

As Omicron has not yet peaked, failure to mitigate the spread will cause unnecessary harm and disruption to public services. We urge Premier Moe to act in the interest of protecting Saskatchewan residents' health, safety and access to vital services.



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Statements From Presidents

“By continuing to do nothing, our government has made it clear that they do not care about whether or not workers get sick. The Omicron variant of COVID-19 is a clear workplace occupational health and safety hazard, and it’s time for our government to step up and do their duty to make sure that workers are kept safe at work,” said Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) President Lori Johb.

“Strong preventative measures will protect our health-care system,” said Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) President Tracy Zambory, RN. “We need to take these steps to protect the public and our registered nurses who want to be able to provide safe, high-quality care to Saskatchewan patients but are unable to do so with extreme staff shortages, and with health services already overwhelmed.”

“The STF position has been, and continues to be, that in-class learning should be prioritized,” said Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (STF) President Patrick Maze. “When there is such rampant community spread as we are seeing now, it is impossible to keep that from impacting our schools and student learning. This is already true for some of our schools where they have been forced to move to temporary online learning to address staffing issues and unmanageable case numbers.”



“Every day, frontline workers are putting themselves at risk for all of us and this government is failing to protect them. The stress and uncertainty are impacting hundreds of workers in our schools, hospitals, long-term care facilities, child-care centres, and group homes and addiction treatment centers,” said Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Saskatchewan President Judy Henley. “My message to Premier Moe is respect frontline workers and do better.”

“SGEU members provide essential services across Saskatchewan and care for some of the most vulnerable residents in the province,” said Saskatchewan Government and General Employees’ Union (SGEU) President Tracey Sauer. “Frontline workers in the public service, crown, health, education, community services, and retail regulatory sectors – all of our members are stretched thin due to COVID-related challenges. We need the government to show leadership by implementing additional public health measures to help provide relief to the workers who are doing their utmost to keep the province healthy and safe.”



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“Our members are exhausted because of short staffing before and during this pandemic,” stated Service Employees International Union West (SEIU-West) President Barbara Cape. “This pressure affects not only the staff but also impacts the services that we can provide. For example, in our labs, some of the very people who are analyzing the PCR tests for COVID are off on injury leave or have quit the SHA because of crushing workloads and constant short staffing. As a result, there is a significant backlog of tests that aren’t getting processed in a timely manner.”

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