

COVID-19 UPDATE

Keeping You Safe



To: All Staff, Professional Staff, Volunteers and Learners

From: Dr. Rhonda Crocker Ellacott, President and CEO, TBRHSC, and CEO, TBRHRI;
Jennifer Wintermans, EVP, Communications Corporate Relations, COVID-19 Lead

Date: December 6, 2021

RE: **Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policy**

First and foremost, we need to begin by stating how proud we are that 96.3% of our staff have been vaccinated. This is an incredible outcome and tells our patients and colleagues how serious we are about keeping them safe as it relates to COVID-19. We would like to thank you for your commitment to our patients and for serving as role models for everyone in the communities we serve. A quick reminder for those who have received their first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to send your vaccination receipt to Occupational Health and Safety (ohs@tbh.net) as soon as possible.

We have continued to educate and inform those who have chosen to not get vaccinated, while reinforcing the fact that full vaccination has been shown to be effective in reducing COVID-19 virus transmission and protecting vaccinated individuals from severe consequences of COVID-19 and its variants. Given the continuing spread of the virus, the compelling data demonstrating a higher incidence of COVID-19 among the unvaccinated population and the increasing levels of contact between individuals as we move into the winter season, the time to act is now. Vaccination is a key element of protection against COVID-19 and mandatory vaccination of Hospital and Health Research Institute workers is one of the critical control measures during this pandemic.

As you all know and as we previously indicated, after the Ontario government decided last month to leave decisions regarding mandatory vaccinations to individual hospitals, we began a full review and assessment of our situation here at TBRHSC and TBRHRI.

Engagement and consultation consisted on the following:

- CEO's Blog on November 5th informing about the need to consider the policy and requesting feedback from all staff, employees, volunteers and learners
- Town Hall on November 10, 2021 informing and requesting feedback
- Survey sent to Senior Leadership Council and members of the Medical Advisory Committee
- Multiple meetings with Regional Hospital CEOs and Chiefs of Staff to support a consistent regional approach.
- Internal communication channels such as an organizational-wide memo (all staff, professional staff, learners, and volunteers), the Daily Informed Newsletter, Hospital Activity Update, daily morning situation updates, COVID-19 information portal on the intranet and poster displays throughout the organization.

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- Multiple meetings with Senior Leadership Council, Bioethics, Occupational Health & Safety, Infection Prevention & Control and Infectious Disease Specialist.

We conducted a thorough review, based on the above consultation of the need for a Vaccination Policy, with support and endorsement by our Medical Advisory Committee, Senior Leadership Team, and special advisors. The latest evidence from the Ontario Science Table and from Public Health Ontario informed decisions. In addition, the team conducted a risk assessment of program and service impacts to ascertain any potential effects that may result from a care and program perspective. Risk mitigation plans have since been developed to ensure the continued access to care and services across the organization.

Additionally, our hospital has collaborated with all 12 Regional Hospitals across the Northwest in support of a mandatory vaccine mandate - which was also endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff and CEOs across all 12 hospitals. This agreement and endorsement speaks to the commitment to quality and duty to protect those most vulnerable across our full region while preserving and maintaining access to critical health services across NW communities.

Last week, based on the recommendation from the Senior Leadership Council (with special advisors), the Board unanimously approved the implementation of a mandatory vaccination **policy for all employees, credentialed professional staff, active volunteers (including Board members) and learners. Both new hires and current staff will be required to receive their first dose by January 14th, 2022 and be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of employment effective February 11th, 2022.**

We can appreciate that for some of you, the small group of people who have not already chosen to be vaccinated, this will be a challenging decision to cope with. However, implementing a mandatory vaccination policy stands by our philosophy to put patient care and safety at the center of everything we do at our Hospital. We need to protect patients (many of whom are at high risk for serious health effects related to COVID-19 illness) who interact with and receive services from staff, learners and volunteers. With the pandemic still having devastating impacts in our province and country, and with the surge in the new Omicron variant, this is a decision that had to be made.

This decision also aligns us with our partners in long-term care and over 120 other hospitals throughout the province, including all 12 in Northwestern Ontario, who support the implementation of a mandatory vaccination policy. On October 19th, the Ontario Hospital Association recommended to the Province a provincial directive that sets out an overarching commitment requiring all health care workers to be vaccinated regardless of employer, with each organization working expeditiously to meet this goal in a manner that addresses their circumstances. This position was formally endorsed by 120 Ontario hospitals employing 166,000 staff. Mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies are now in place at most Ontario hospitals and at all long-term care homes.

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So, what happens next?

Well, the implementation plan allows adequate time for unvaccinated staff to decide on the interval period between both doses (21 days to 8 weeks) based on Ministry of Health and National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) guidelines. Individuals wanting to have their doses with a full 8-week interval in between doses will need to have their first dose no later than December 17, 2021, to be compliant with the timelines for the requirement of the second dose date of February 11, 2022.

Unvaccinated staff can book an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine in several ways:

- The e-health scheduling system at <https://tbdhu.canadaehs.com/tbdhu/hospital/>. Those who do not have access to a computer can use one in the Hospital's library. You can also access the scheduling system online on your smartphone.
- You can call 684-6000 (extension 4585) to book an appointment by speaking with a clerk during regular clinic hours or by leaving a voicemail.
- Staff may also get vaccinated through an external source, such as a primary health care provider or the Thunder Bay District Health Unit via <https://www.tbdhu.com/covidclinics>.

Individuals with a valid medical exemption that is in line with Ministry of Health's updated guidance for medical exemptions, may be exempt from this mandatory requirement. Submission must include written proof of a bona fide medical reason, provided by a physician or registered nurse in the extended class that sets out a documented medical reason for not being fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and the effective time period for that medical reason. Please contact Occupational Health and Safety for more information.

Some of you may ask about creed-based or religious exemptions. The Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC's) Policy Statement issued on September 22, 2021, on COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates and Proof of Vaccination Mandates states that "the OHRC's position is that a person who chooses not to be vaccinated based on personal preference does not have the right to accommodation under the Code". Such requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by our Human Resources Department.

We are here to support and will help individuals upon request to ensure compliance with the COVID-19 vaccination requirement, including ensuring access to a vaccination appointment, accommodating work schedules if necessary to attend vaccination appointments and making referrals to health professionals who can provide education and information about the COVID-19 vaccination.

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These are the important dates to keep in mind:

December 6, 2021 - Announcement of mandatory vaccination requirement.

December 17, 2021 - Individuals wanting to have their doses with a full 8-week interval in between doses, will need to have their first dose no later than December 17, 2021 in order to be compliant with the timelines for the requirement of the second dose date of February 11, 2022.

January 14, 2022 - Requirement for first dose (at minimum). Individuals who have not provided proof of first dose may resign or will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence until the earlier of two (2) weeks or until proof of first dose is received.

January 28, 2022 – Individuals who have not received their first dose and provided proof may resign or will be terminated with cause for non-compliance with Hospital policy.

February 11, 2022 – Requirement for second dose. Individuals who have not provided proof of all required doses may resign or will be terminated with cause for non-compliance with Hospital policy.

It is the responsibility of employees and credentialed professional staff to meet the requirements and deadlines above. Employees who have questions should monitor their TBRHSC/TBRHRI email for communications from Human Resources and speak to their manager. Credentialed professional staff who have questions should contact the Chief of Staff.

We are anticipating that there will be some employees or credentialed professional staff who will choose to not get vaccinated and we have contingency plans in place to manage this. We value every team member yet we need to do what is best to protect our patients and the safety of our organization and community. We are working through contingency plans to address the absences and departures of colleagues who would choose not to be fully vaccinated. Our assessment is that such absences or departures would be less disruptive than reactive measures needed following notification of COVID-19 positive patients or health care workers that trigger contact tracing, increased risks of hospital transmission or outbreak, and unexpected temporary loss of health care workers for 14 days due to high-risk exposures or due to having acquired COVID-19.

We have all done an incredible job during this pandemic as a team pivoting and adapting to changing circumstances that have challenged us at every angle. It will be key to continue working as a team, showing empathy, and not judging our colleagues who may choose to not get fully vaccinated. Please, most importantly, be respectful of one another.

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In closing, this policy stands by our philosophy to put patient care and safety at the centre of everything we do at our Hospital.

For more information, please refer to the [COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination Policy](#)

All Hospital COVID-19 updates and resources are available on the iNtranet at <https://comms.tbrhsc.net/covid-19-information/>.