



Masks, Mandatory Vaccines, and Vaccines Passports

09.10.21

Although over 78% of Manitoba's population has been double-vaccinated (>83% with at least one dose), the province reinstated a public mask mandate beginning August 28, announced a vaccine passport for all Manitobans, and is implementing mandatory vaccination for health care and education workers.

The HSC would like to provide updated information about what the MB government is requiring and the rationale behind the new orders.

Mask Mandate

Starting August 28, masks are required in all indoor public spaces. The reason cited for this health order is due to the risks associated with the Delta variant of COVID-19. This variant is substantially more transmissible than the "wild" (earlier) versions of the virus. With the earlier versions of the virus, one person was expected to infect about 3 others. With the Delta variant, one person is expected to infect around seven others. The mask mandate is public health being cautious and proactive.

Vaccine Passports

Vaccine passports were announced for participating in certain public events in Manitoba. Unvaccinated Hutterites will mostly be affected by the prohibition of dining-in restaurants, and hospital visitations, as well as the requirement to quarantine when re-entering Manitoba from out of province. People will have to show their vaccination cards in order to be eligible for those activities.

One of the reasons given for this policy is to avoid further lockdowns which devastates the economy among other problems. Rather than imposing further restrictions on ALL Manitobans, those that have been vaccinated and who are a lot less likely to infect others will be given the opportunity to participate in some public events. Those who have not been vaccinated, will be restricted from participating in these public events.

Mandatory Vaccines/Frequent Testing

Mandatory vaccines (or, alternatively, frequent testing) were announced for public-facing health care workers and educators in Manitoba. Education staff working in our schools must have received their second dose by October 17, 2021, or test for COVID up to three times per week to ensure the safety of the learning community. There has been no information shared on how this may be enforced, but there have been indications there will be an "education first" approach.

Natural Immunity

Based on multiple studies¹ in Israel, natural immunity may provide a level of protection that may surpass that of being double-vaccinated (although natural immunity plus at least one dose seems to provide even better protection). The most significant problem with acquiring natural immunity is that in too many cases, the most vulnerable suffer severe (and potentially long term) health outcomes or even death. Currently, MB Health does not recognize natural immunity as being protective against COVID-19 beyond three months, nor does this protection allow those with natural immunity to obtain a vaccine passport without being vaccinated.

Concerns regarding Mandatory Vaccines and Vaccine Passports

There are many reasons to think carefully about mandatory vaccines. Currently they are only required for teachers and healthcare workers, but this may expand because emerging statistics increasingly point to their effectiveness, risks notwithstanding.

The HSC encourages people to discuss their concerns with their healthcare providers and remember that Public Health is charged with the responsibility of ensuring the safety of as many people as possible.

Please keep in mind that:

1. Every person should make an informed choice about whether or not to get vaccinated based on good and factual information.
2. According to some studies, people who have natural immunity may have better protection against COVID-19 than those who are double vaccinated, but this status is not yet officially recognized by any of the provinces.

Studies also show that vaccines and natural immunity provide protection against COVID-19 reinfection (protection length is indeterminate but appears to be greater than 6 months), including the Delta variant. What will happen with the Mu variant remains to be seen.

3. The topic of vaccine passports can be divisive. Remember who and whose you are and act accordingly in a loving and neighbourly way towards all people.

Conclusion

As the percentage of people with vaccinated and/or natural immunity grows, the risk of serious outcomes due to COVID 19 decreases. May we look to good and factual information and avoid conspiratorial and dooms-day thinking. This is not the first time such a crisis has challenged humanity. With the help of God, we will reach the end of this COVID battle. May this happen without the scars of polarization continuing to plague us.

1

<https://www.science.org/content/article/having-sars-cov-2-once-confers-much-greater-immunity-vaccine-vaccination-remains-vital>