

Vaccination policies examined as Federal Election heads into second week

As the number of new cases of COVID-19 in Ontario continues to trend upward, it is doing so as many families are focused on a return to school with kids under the age of 12 not yet eligible for a vaccine ? and it is also doing so in the heat of a Federal election where vaccine policy has become a central issue.

Last week, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health issued a directive mandating hospitals and home and community care service providers to have a COVID-19 vaccination policy for employees, staff, contractors, students and volunteers, including personal support workers (PSWs).

?This is similar to vaccination policy requirements currently in place for long-term care homes,? said the Province in a statement. ?Vaccination policies will also be implemented in other higher-risk settings where personal support workers and direct support workers provide care, including licensed retirement homes, congregate group homes and day programs for adults with developmental disabilities, children's treatment centres and other services for children with special needs, and licensed children's residential settings.?

The Province's roll-out of new targeted vaccine policies coincided with many large Canadian companies announcing they would require proof of vaccine for many employees and Liberal leader Justin Trudeau floating the idea of requiring civil servants to be vaccinated as well.

This was contrasted with Conservative leader Erin O'Toole stating rapid testing would be a better course of action for Federal workers.

Here at home, opinions varied among the individuals vying to be the next Members of Parliament for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill and Newmarket-Aurora.

AURORA-OAK RIDGES-RICHMOND HILL

?COVID-19 has had a serious effect on the health and well-being of all Canadians,? says incumbent Conservative candidate Leona Alleslev. ?We must do everything we can to overcome the virus, end the pandemic and recover our communities and our economy. Dr. Tam declared Canada was in the fourth wave of the pandemic on 14 August, three days before Justin Trudeau called this unnecessary election. Vaccination offers the greatest protection for our citizens and our community. All Canadians are encouraged to get both doses of the vaccine.

?The policy position of both the Liberal and Conservative party is centred around requiring vaccination or accommodation through means of rapid testing.?

Liberal candidate Leah Taylor Roy, however, says she believes mandatory vaccination for public servants, and air and train passengers is a ?necessary step further? towards ending the pandemic.

?My family and I are proud to be fully vaccinated because we know vaccines work,? says Ms. Taylor Roy. ?Just follow the science ? Public Health Ontario has reported that 95.2 per cent of COVID-19 cases were in unvaccinated individuals, with similar trends for hospitalizations and deaths.

?We all pay for our health care system. We don't need to spend more money on rapid tests when we have a safe way to fight COVID-19 right now. Our incredible health care workers across the country have been begging Canadians to get the vaccine, and after 18 months they deserve a break.

?Ending this pandemic is in our hands now and we need to be firm.?

NEWMARKET-AURORA

NDP candidate Yvonne Kelly says she is in favour of mandatory vaccines, with exceptions based on religious beliefs or health conditions.

"The precedent is already set where vaccines are concerned," she says. "Our children cannot attend public schools unless they have up-to-date immunization records, of course with minor exceptions, and this is a plan we have been working with for decades. Overall public health concerns and collective well-being have to be our guiding objective.

"Increasingly, public and private organizations and institutions are also requiring mandatory vaccines for participation which reflects the growing belief that in order for them to function safely as public entities they are acknowledging the need for vaccines. I do not, however, want to see mandatory [measures] resulting in a risk for the criminalization of those who are not vaccinated so the details on how we implement this is important.

"For communities, there are legitimate concerns and consistent public education about the value and safety of vaccinations is the answer. Also, we must recognize that access to vaccinations is not the same for all communities; all measures must be taken to ensure it is possible for everyone to receive the vaccine. In the case of civil servants and travellers, which falls under Federal jurisdiction, mandatory vaccines with limited exceptions should apply."

Conservative candidate Harold Kim, however, offered an opposing viewpoint.

"Adult Canadians are not children and can make their own decisions, not have them dictated," he said. "That is why Erin O'Toole's Conservatives won't mandate everyone to be vaccinated if they choose not to do so. However, it has been pointed out that there is really no difference between Justin Trudeau's stance on vaccinations and Erin O'Toole's. Justin Trudeau has provided that those who refuse vaccination will need to consider alternative measures such as testing and screening.

"The Conservatives believe that those who don't get vaccinated will be required to undergo rapid testing to protect our most vulnerable Canadians. Unvaccinated Canadian passengers will be required to present a recent negative test result or pass a rapid test before getting on a bus, train, plane or ship, and federal public servants who are not vaccinated will need to pass a daily rapid test. The policies are the same. This is just another example of the Liberals misleading the public yet again. Except this election, the public knows better.

"There is no doubt that vaccines are the most important tool in the fight against COVID-19 and we encourage every Canadian who can get vaccinated, to do so."

Liberal incumbent Tony Van Bynen, like Ms. Kelly, has also voiced support for mandatory vaccines for civil servants.

"I am absolutely in favour of vaccine requirements for our Federal workforce and for folks who want to board planes, trains and ships here in Canada," he says. "Any company, organization, or province that wants to put their own vaccine requirements in place also has my full support. We already require vaccines for a whole range of other diseases, so I am not sure why this one would be any different.

"If someone chooses not to get vaccinated, that's obviously their right, but it doesn't mean they should then be able to get on an airplane and put everyone else on board at risk."

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter