

Stop Canada's sixth pandemic wave! Build the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee!

Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
27 March 2022

The following statement was adopted at the latest meeting of the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC) on March 27. The meeting was organized in response to the reckless decision by the federal and provincial governments of all political stripes across Canada to lift mask mandates in schools, along with almost all anti-COVID-19 public health measures.

Despite the refusal from public health authorities to acknowledge it, Canada is currently experiencing the beginning of a sixth wave of mass infection, fuelled by the deadly Omicron sub-variant BA.2. According to incomplete government data, the highly transmissible BA.2 already accounts for half of all cases in the country's two most populous provinces, Ontario and Quebec.

This statement must serve as a fighting tool to lead the way forward in the campaign for a Zero-COVID policy among educators in Canadian schools. We encourage our readers to distribute it widely and discuss it with their friends and colleagues. Contact the CERSC at cersc.csppb@gmail.com to join.

As part of their pandemic policy of mass infection, provincial governments across the country have eliminated almost all public health measures, including removing mask mandates in schools and most public places. This irresponsible and dangerous decision, fully supported by Justin Trudeau's federal government, will fuel a sixth wave of mass infection and death that is already developing in Canada. Unless working people intervene by taking up a political struggle for a Zero-COVID program that places the protection of human life ahead of the accumulation of corporate profits,

thousands of people will be hospitalized and lose their lives prematurely, while untold numbers will suffer from "Long COVID."

Adopting the illegitimate demands of the far-right "Freedom Convoy," the right-wing governments of Doug Ford in Ontario and Jason Kenney in Alberta, and the New Democratic Party government in British Columbia have abolished mask mandates in schools. In Quebec schools, where the virus is circulating freely, students and staff have been allowed to remove masks in class for over two weeks.

The policy of "living with the virus" is not based on science and the preservation of human life, but on the financial interests of the banks, big business and the wealthy. Contrary to what governments and their subservient public health agencies claim, the pandemic will not become "endemic." The Omicron BA.2 sub-variant is considered by some epidemiologists to be a distinct variant due to its increased infectiousness and ability to reinfect people already infected with the original Omicron strain. It has already led to a resurgence of the pandemic in Europe and Asia, including in China, the only country that has so far managed to control the pandemic through robust health measures. Hong Kong is currently experiencing its deadliest wave of the pandemic.

BA.2, which the WHO has called the most contagious variant known to date, is already spreading in Canada and is estimated to account for more than 20 percent of cases in the country and much more in some provinces. Obviously, this is a clear underestimate since access to PCR testing for the population has been virtually eliminated. The removal of mandatory masking in schools will only accelerate the spread of the

potentially debilitating and deadly virus.

Our committee opposes and condemns this decision! Thousands of children, school staff and their families will be unnecessarily infected. Studies show that BA.2 poses a significant risk to children, while the Omicron wave has caused the most deaths among youth. Furthermore, reinfection does not confer natural immunity, but rather weakens the immune system.

Gosia Gasperowicz, a University of Calgary developmental biologist, explained, “Even if BA.2 wouldn’t be much more severe than BA.1, it’s still severe enough to kill many people... It’s not like a common cold. It’s really dangerous. It’s a virus that affects not only our pulmonary system but also our brain, it can damage our heart and damage our kidneys... Removing all the protections that we have is a folly now with what we know about BA.2.”

Despite a recent decline, hospitalizations are still at a level as high as the peak of the third wave in April 2021. In addition to future hospitalizations caused by a sixth wave, experts warn of a “tsunami” in hospitals and health care due to chronic illnesses that will overwhelm many victims of the disease.

Faced with a virus whose long-term consequences are not yet known, public health policies should be guided by the precautionary principle. But the ruling class is determined to let the virus circulate unimpeded so that profits continue to flow unhindered to the financial oligarchy.

Schools are not safe! The experience of the pandemic in Canada shows how each wave was directly linked to the reopening of schools, which act as a major vector of transmission. The claim that vaccinations alone can protect us has been thoroughly disproved. Despite high vaccination rates, more than 6,300 people lost their lives across Canada during the Omicron wave.

Our program and our demands, based on a Zero-COVID policy, are urgently needed. Schools and non-essential businesses must be closed until the pandemic is fully under control, with full financial compensation for impacted workers. This must be part of a global pandemic elimination strategy that includes a worldwide vaccination program and health measures similar to those deployed in China.

The unions have no intention of protecting us. On the contrary, they are celebrating the withdrawal of anti-COVID measures. Since the beginning of the

pandemic, they have agreed to send us back to work without adequate protection, suppressing the class struggle in favor of a policy of collaboration with the establishment. The union bureaucrats, who manage multi-billion-dollar investment funds and enrich themselves personally from the sweat of rank-and-file workers, are determined to fully “reopen” the capitalist economy from which they derive their privileged social position. This past week, the unions enthused over the New Democrats’ decision to reach a “confidence-and-supply” agreement with the Liberals to keep Trudeau in power until 2025, allowing the government to continue its involvement in NATO’s proxy war with Russia, boost military spending and impose austerity on workers.

The great powers are trying to deflect internal social tensions intensified by the pandemic outwards and channel social anger towards an external enemy. The war between Russia and NATO, provoked for three decades by the imperialist powers—including Canada—risks degenerating into a third nuclear world war. Meanwhile, the pandemic continues to rage and kill thousands of people every day. It must stop!

We call on all teachers and staff to build a network of rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporatist trade unions, to fight for a Zero-COVID policy in schools and to counter the attempts of the ruling elites to lead the world’s population into the maelstrom of a Third World War. The war that must be fought is the war against COVID-19.



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