



CANADA

COVID-19: Quebec drops vaccination mandate for health-care workers



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WATCH: Quebec drops COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health-care workers



Quebec is backtracking on its enforced [COVID-19](#) vaccination mandate for health-care workers, government officials announced Wednesday.

After pushing back its deadline multiple times, Health Minister Christian Dubé said the province will abandon the measure altogether, as the health-care network can't afford to lose the thousands of non-vaccinated employees.

The loss of unvaccinated staff would have had a “devastating effect on the system,” according to the health ministry.

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The province's plan to suspend unvaccinated workers as of Nov. 15 would have forced the health network to cut services and would have compromised efforts to improve working conditions for all employees.

While 97 per cent of those who work in the health network are [vaccinated](#), 14,000 haven't received a first dose, and of those, 5,000 are in direct contact with patients.

While vaccination will no longer be mandatory for current employees, Dubé added that all new health-care hires will have to be vaccinated.

Unvaccinated staff will be obliged to get tested for COVID three times a week, and those who don't comply will be suspended without pay.

The government had originally set an Oct. 15 deadline for all workers to be vaccinated but extended it in the hopes of convincing the remaining staff to get their shots.

The vaccination rate among health-care workers has gone up from about 90 per cent to 97 since the government first announced its intention in August to impose a mandate.

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Michel Lachance, an unvaccinated paramedic who is part of an ongoing lawsuit against the province's vaccinate mandate, told Global News he is relieved. “I am really happy, it relieves a weight that I [have had] for a couple of months now,” said Lachance.

“It was the legal and correct decision,” said Natalia Manole, a lawyer representing unvaccinated employees in the lawsuit.

Daniel Desharnais, an assistant deputy minister in charge of liaising with the local health networks, said the province’s health system is so short-staffed that a labour reduction of even one per cent would have “very damaging effects.” Applying the decree would have resulted in a reduction in labour hours of about four per cent overall and up to nine per cent in some services, he said.

Desharnais said a reduction in services in areas such as home care or long-term care could have a “domino effect” on other services by forcing patients to stay longer in already crowded hospitals.

The health minister however warned the unvaccinated workers that the health network would likely replace unvaccinated staff as soon as they have enough vaccinated employees from which to choose.

Health officials have repeatedly stressed that vaccination against COVID-19 is necessary to protect vulnerable patients.

—with files from *The Canadian Press*

