Policy Directive: Proof of Full COVID-19 Vaccination (SHA-02-009)

PHYSICIAN Key Messages and Questions & Answers

Key Messages

- Key Dates:
    - Early November: team members will be required to submit proof of vaccination. More information on this process will be shared as it is available.
    - Early November: team members who do not provide proof of full vaccination are asked to participate in the SHA COVID-19 Monitored Testing Program. More information on this process will be shared as it is available.

The Policy Directive
The following is a summary of key points and messaging related to the policy directive. Please read the full policy directive to ensure you understand all that it entails.

- All current SHA team members are required to provide proof of full COVID-19 vaccination (be fully vaccinated) by early November – final date TBD.
- Physicians/practitioner staff and contracted individuals who are not directly employed by the SHA have the option of providing proof of full COVID-19 vaccination or agreeing to participate in the SHA COVID-19 Monitored Testing Program (MTP) at their own cost. Staff and practitioner staff employed by the SHA who do not provide proof of full COVID-19 vaccination are asked to participate in the MTP at their own cost, and may request an accommodation via the process highlighted on the Proof of Full COVID-19 Vaccination policy directive intranet page.
    - Details on the monitored testing program will be shared in a future update.
- Team members who refuse to provide proof of vaccination or enter the MTP, are in breach of this policy directive.
- External applicants for team member positions will be required to provide proof of full vaccination prior to hire, contract, or engagement.
- Private care providers must provide proof of full COVID-19 vaccination before they enter SHA facilities to provide direct patient care.
    - A private care provider is any individual licensed or unregulated care provider privately funded by a patient or family to provide patient care in an SHA healthcare facility.

Why do we need the policy directive?

- The SHA has developed this policy because we do not believe that we can provide a safe workplace any longer without our front-line healthcare teams either being vaccinated or undertaking a rigorous testing regimen.
- This policy directive is part of our commitment to do everything we can to keep our

health care teams, patients, residents and families as safe from COVID as possible. By doing so, we will not only be saving lives but helping protect the health care system from being overwhelmed.

- This policy strengthens the work SHA has done throughout the pandemic to keep our healthcare facilities safe, including mandatory use of PPE, daily symptom checks for all health care workers (HCWs), visitor restrictions, Infection Prevention Control measures, and ongoing employee and physician education.

- Currently approximately 1 in 5 HCWs are not vaccinated. Given the high transmissibility and increased risk of severe illness and death from the Delta variant, it is essential that we act now.

- We have seen more than a one thousand percent increase in COVID cases since early July. COVID hospital and COVID ICU occupancy have tripled over that time, with pressures on our hospitals continuing to escalate quickly.

- This is driven by a Delta variant that is more transmissible and escalating pressures on our hospitals exponentially quicker than previous COVID surges.

- There have been multiple scenarios recently where unvaccinated team members have introduced COVID-19 infection into the settings we serve across the SHA, resulting in COVID-19 exposures and infections.

- Testing is not an equivalent alternative to vaccination. Testing *detects* infection after it has already happened. In asymptomatic persons who test positive it is likely they were transmitting virus to others in the 48 hours prior to the test result. This is in contrast to vaccination which has the ability to *prevent* the infection from occurring.

- Vaccination against COVID-19 is the most effective means to protect our HCWs, prevent outbreaks in SHA facilities, protect those we serve and preserve workforce capacity to protect the stability of our provincial health system.

- Unvaccinated team members put themselves, patients, and the health system at very high risk. Given the vulnerability of the people we serve, directly and indirectly, we must ensure that nearly everyone is vaccinated.

- Evidence confirms that being fully vaccinated mitigates potential harm to patients and HCWs. HCWs have an ethical and professional responsibility to protect others. Vaccination is a tool to assist in meeting this standard.

- COVID vaccines are proven to significantly reduce COVID transmission, reduce hospitalizations, reduce ICU admissions and reduce fatalities.

Showing Proof of Vaccination

- Effective October 4, 2021, team members will be asked to submit a self-declaration regarding their vaccination status, intention to get vaccinated, intention to enroll in the SHA testing program at their cost, or intention to seek accommodation.

- For the proof of vaccination documentation, team members will be required to use their COVID-19 Vaccination Record from MySaskHealthRecord. Team members who have not yet set-up an account are strongly encouraged to do so via eHealth as soon as possible to ensure they do not miss the November submission deadline.

- The processes and procedures related to the collection of the MySaskHealthRecord proof of vaccination records are still being developed. The SHA will share details once the process is finalized.

Scientifically-backed messages:
- 60% of the total population is considered fully vaccinated, but this is much less than the amount needed to allow us to live with COVID-19.
- Most non-pharmaceutical public health measures (physical distancing, smaller group sizes, etc.) are only voluntary at this time, and compliance with these measures is decreasing.
- COVID-19 vaccines are effective for:
    - Preventing infection with COVID-19;
    - Decreasing the severity of illness when illness occurs; and
    - Decreasing forward transmission of the virus to others.
- COVID-19 illness is much more serious than influenza, and COVID vaccines are significantly more effective at preventing illness than influenza vaccines are at preventing flu.
- Safety of COVID-19 vaccines is well established (in the medium term).
- Serial testing (rapid antigen testing) is not equal to vaccination. Testing *detects* infection after it is present, vaccination *prevents* infections.

Questions and Answers

Policy

Why was it important for the SHA to make this policy directive now?

The SHA maintains a commitment to safety, including safety of its employees, physicians, patients, families and partners. There is significant evidence that unvaccinated individuals are contributing to the spread of COVID-19 including in healthcare settings. Vaccination is a way to make the workplace as safe as possible in this situation.

Despite efforts to make vaccination as easy as possible, **1 in 5 healthcare workers** are not vaccinated. Unvaccinated team members put themselves, patients, and the health system at very high risk. Given the vulnerability of the people we serve, directly and indirectly, we need to ensure that nearly everyone is vaccinated.

Why do non front-line staff need to provide proof of vaccination?

All team members, including office staff, should be protected against COVID-19 as much as possible. Being vaccinated means you are less likely to catch the virus and pass it onto others in your workplace, or even to others in your workplace who then pass it onto those we serve. It helps us keep the workplace as safe as possible for everyone.

What if I work from home?

Team members working from home could be required to attend an SHA facility at any time. Since circumstances could be of an urgent nature, team members need to be ready to respond. This means providing proof of vaccination or requesting an accommodation and enrolling in the SHA COVID-19 Monitored Testing Program.

Who does the policy apply to?

All SHA team members, which includes:

- Staff
- Practitioner Staff
- Contracted Individuals
- Patient Family Partners
- Knowledge Keepers
- Volunteers
- Learners

Does this policy directive apply to members of the public coming to SHA facilities?

No. This policy directive does not apply to the public. Members of the public attending SHA facilities will still go through screening and are expected to follow the current SHA requirements for mask use.

What happens if I refuse to provide proof of vaccination or enter the testing program?

SHA policies have standard language about how not following a policy is managed. It depends on the situation, and some of the things the SHA considers are requirements from:
- collective bargaining agreements;
- applicable legislation, regulations, policies, procedures and processes; and/or
- SHA Practitioner Staff Bylaws.

Although losing one's job is rarely the first course of action, it is important to know that breaches of SHA policy (including this directive) may result in discipline **up to and including** termination/revocation of:
- employment;
- contractual relationship;
- practitioner staff appointment; and/or privileges.

Team members will not be permitted to work in SHA facilities if they do not provide proof of COVID-19 full vaccination, or enter the SHA COVID-19 Monitored Testing Program.

Hiring

Will all new Practitioner Staff be required to be fully vaccinated?

Yes. Effective October 4, 2021 all external applicants for team member positions will be required to provide proof of full vaccination prior to offer of employment, contract, or engagement.

What proof of vaccination documentation will be accepted?

Your [COVID-19 vaccination record from MySaskHealthRecord](). We will not accept the record of COVID-19 vaccination cards received at time of vaccination.

What proof of vaccination will be required/accepted for applicants from outside of Saskatchewan?

Proof of vaccination documentation or a vaccination passport authorized by the jurisdiction in which the prospective new hire is currently living.

Can an offer/contract to join Practitioner Staff be made prior to receiving proof of vaccination?

No offer should be made until this has been received. This will be similar to requirements utilized for Criminal Record Check.

Can an applicant reapply for a join Practitioner Staff after being fully vaccinated?

Yes, we encourage interested applicants to reapply once they are fully vaccinated.

Where will Practitioner Staff Affairs save Proof of Vaccination for new Practitioner Staff?

Upon validation of proof of vaccination the appropriate physician lead is able to make an offer. Once applicant accepts, proof of vaccination can be sent to your local PSA office with other required new hire documents for a letter of offer to be processed.

Process

How do I provide proof of my vaccination status?

The SHA is working through the details of how this information will be collected and managed. Details will be shared once the process is finalized.

How do team members provide their negative test details?

The SHA is working through the details of how this information will be collected and managed. Details will be shared once the process is finalized.

Testing & Safety

What is the SHA COVID-19 Monitored Testing Program and how does it work?

Any team members who do not provide proof of full COVID-19 vaccination will be required to enroll in the SHA COVID-19 Monitored Testing Program to ensure the safety of themselves, patients, team members and our health system.

Full details on the testing program will be provided in a future update.

Will I have to pay for testing as part of the SHA COVID-19 Monitored Testing Program?

Yes, you will be required to participate in the program at your own cost.

Why isn't rapid antigen testing equal to vaccination to protect team members and patients?

Vaccination protects individuals better than rapid antigen testing, leading to greater safety for patients and other SHA team members.

Testing continues to be crucial part of the approach, but fundamentally testing detects infection after it has already happened. In asymptomatic persons who test positive it is **likely they were transmitting virus to others in the 48 hours prior to the test result**. This is in contrast to vaccination which has the ability to prevent the infection from occurring.

Antigen tests have the most value in situations where people are testing repeatedly on a routine basis, and the more frequent that repetition the more valuable the test becomes.

Why isn't masking enough?

Before vaccines were available, continuous masking was the best option to protect team members and patients. Thankfully it has made a significant impact on COVID-19 transmission. However, masking is vulnerable to human error and mishaps, which is why we need to use all available measures to protect against harm.

The immunity from your vaccine is always on, while your mask might not be, so together they give you the best protection against COVID-19 now available.

Do I still need to wear PPE if I'm fully vaccinated?
Yes. Continue to follow the most current SHA Infection Prevention and Control requirements for appropriate PPE use in all SHA facilities, including for community care.

Why are we making SHA team members pay for their own tests?

At this point in the pandemic the accountability is on the team member, not on the health system to fund this option which provides less safety to our team members and patients than vaccination.

In most sectors user paid options are promoted, however the impact across health programming in the SHA and lack of equitable access to user paid third parties has led us to this model which would support team members across the province equitably and pay for the expense of the program (primarily human resources, IT infrastructure and the procurement of tests – not from the federally gifted supply).

This approach is consistent with the Regulations, which say that a team member who is not fully vaccinated and is required to provide a negative COVID-19 test result is responsible for taking the test during non-work/non-paid/non-contracted hours and paying any associated costs. (The Employers' COVID-19 Emergency Regulations, 2021)

As well, federally funded tests and health care dollars cannot be allocated to proof of negative test results.

Vaccines & Vaccination

Which vaccine(s) are acceptable?

Saskatchewan and the SHA accept vaccines that are approved by Health Canada (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD, or Johnson & Johnson (Janssen)).

Vaccines that are non-Health Canada approved are also acceptable, but an additional dose of a Health Canada approved mRNA vaccine may be required to ensure optimal protection. Please contact OH&S to determine if you need further vaccination.

What is the definition of being fully vaccinated?

Team members are considered fully vaccinated **two weeks after** receiving:
- a second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in a two-dose series (mixed series are acceptable); or
- a single dose of an approved one-dose COVID-19 vaccine.

If you received non-Health Canada approved vaccines, please contact OH&S to determine if you need further vaccination.

If I had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get vaccinated?
Yes, team members who have tested positive for COVID-19 still need to be fully vaccinated. You can get your vaccine right after you have completed your self-isolation.

What if I have questions about COVID-19 vaccines?

You can find information you can trust on the Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19 vaccine website, from SHA Occupational Health staff, from Public Health, or from your Family Physician.

I have questions about the safety of the vaccines. Where can I get more information?

COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. They have been fully tested, evaluated and reviewed. A vaccine is only approved by Health Canada if it is safe, it works, it meets manufacturing standards, and the benefits outweigh any risks.

For more information go to the Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19 vaccine website.

Privacy

How will my personal health information related to COVID vaccination be used?

Proof of vaccination, and any other required personal health information, will be protected as per the SHA Privacy and Confidentiality Policy.

How is the SHA protecting my vaccine status? / How do I know that my personal health information (my vaccine status) is protected?

Your personal health information is protected in accordance with *The Health Information Protection Act* (HIPA) and is kept secure by the SHA. Access to the identifiable information is limited to those who need to know for the purposes of administering the policy directive.

Who within the SHA will know my vaccination status?

Your personal health information is protected in accordance with *The Health Information Protection Act* (HIPA) and is kept secure by the SHA. Access to identifiable information will be on a need to know basis only for the purposes of administering and enforcing the policy directive. Reports generated with vaccination data that are shared with the Ministry of Health and other partners do not contain any personal data.

How long will the SHA keep my vaccination status / exemption?

As long as is necessary to enforce the policy directive.

How long will the SHA keep the records of my positive / negative test?

As long as is necessary to enforce the policy directive.