



HEU statement on new flu vaccine policy

The provincial government and B.C.'s health authorities are implementing a new flu vaccine policy requiring health care workers to wear masks for the entire flu season if they do not get the annual vaccine.

The policy applies to all publicly-funded facilities where patient or resident care takes place, as well as to community health care settings such as the residence of a home care client.

B.C.'s provincial health officer, Dr. Perry Kendall, says health care workers would be subject to "progressive discipline" if they do not comply with policy.

The Hospital Employees' Union will be monitoring the implementation of the policy to ensure that members' collective agreement and other rights are respected.

HEU encourages its members to get the annual flu vaccine on a voluntary basis and supports more effective education and easier access to vaccination programs as methods of increasing vaccination rates within the health care workforce.

And the union is concerned that the new policy requiring unvaccinated workers to wear masks could be expensive and negatively affect the quality of the patient and resident care experience.

For example, implementing the new policy for the four- to five-month flu season could result in the use and disposal of several million additional surgical masks in health care workplaces.

HEU is also concerned about the impact that the policy will have on interactions with patients and care home residents. In particular, it will become more difficult to clearly communicate with those with hearing difficulties and who may rely more heavily on visual cues.

Health employers can direct employees to wear protective clothing and equipment where it believes such precautions are necessary for the protection of patient and worker health and safety.

If you have questions about the implementation of this policy in your workplace, please refer them to your employer

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HEU will be working with its allied unions in the health care sector to review the policy and coordinate a response to its implementation.

If you have concerns that your collective agreement or other rights may be negatively impacted by the policy, please contact your HEU shop steward.

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