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## Update on vaccine mandates in K-12 system

The B.C. government has [announced mandatory vaccinations for the province's over 30,000 public service workers](#). While this mandate does not directly cover workers in the K-12 education system, CUPE anticipates school districts will be applying similar mandates in K-12 schools in the near future.

[CUPE BC President Karen Ranalletta issued a statement](#) saying, “the B.C. government implementing mandatory vaccinations across the public service makes sense as they are the best proven measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.... Given the rise in COVID cases in our schools, we think it also seems prudent to apply this mandate to the K-12 system.”

In preparation for possible K-12 system vaccine mandates, the Ministry of Education held the first meeting of an ad hoc advisory committee last night with BCPSEA, CUPE and other partners to develop common principles, standards, and guidelines. CUPE supports this work and is calling for the B.C. government and all school districts to adopt a uniformed approach that ensures all immunization plans are effective, efficient, and respect the rights of K-12 school workers. CUPE also stresses that any vaccination mandate must ensure there are reasonable accommodations for the small number of education workers with recognized human rights exemptions.

All CUPE members are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated, as it is the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. In addition to considering vaccine mandates, CUPE is urging school districts to expand safety measures that promote clean and healthy schools, such as permanent daytime custodial services.

If your school district is considering a mandatory vaccination policy, here are some steps your local should be taking with your National Representative:

- Ensuring that the employer consults with the local before implementing a policy. It is not the local's role to 'approve', 'agree to', or 'consent' to any employer policies, but the union should have notice and an opportunity to comment on new employer policies.
- Considering whether the policy gives reasonable timelines for employees to be vaccinated.
- Reviewing the process for employees to raise legitimate human rights grounds for exemption from the policy – is there a clear direction about who those requests should be directed to and how they will be handled?
- Asking how member's personal information will be handled and ensuring that the personal information is not shared outside or used for any other purposes
- Looking closely at what steps will be taken for those who refuse vaccination and what consequences will follow. Advocate for consequences less than termination, such as unpaid leaves of absence, with an opportunity for review if, and when, the threat of the pandemic recedes.