

Unifor's response to COVID-19 prevention measures in D3 workplaces

To: Unifor members at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis,

As you are aware, our union is evaluating and responding to the announcement of workplace vaccine mandates in D3 workplaces in Canada. As part of this process, we wish to clarify important information regarding Unifor's overall position on workplace vaccine mandates.

As a union, we are not responsible for the workplace policies presented by D3 employers. However, we have a duty to evaluate each one in the specific context and workplace in which it is applied, and we have been doing this since employers began adopting vaccine mandates over the summer. We would do the same with any new employer workplace policy.

While we support vaccine mandates to ensure the health and safety of all workers, we have been very clear that **these policies must be reasonable and fair**: they must account for the context in which the workers of that sector interact with each other and with members of the public.

In the case of the auto sector, we are considering many factors in our review of D3 workplace vaccine mandates, including:

- Other COVID-19 prevention measures in place in workplaces
- The enclosed nature of an auto plant and the limitations of public exposure
- Exemplary health and safety measures and low transmission rates in auto workplaces throughout the pandemic so far
- The reasonableness of the delays between the announcement of a policy and the impact on a worker
- The fact that D3 vaccine mandates are only being applied to workplaces in Canada, and not in the United States.
- Storing health information of our members in the United States.

We have never expressed support or endorsed the employer's decision to terminate long-standing, exemplary, employees under the guise of a workplace vaccine mandate, and we never will.

Unifor's position on COVID-19 prevention

On August 23, our union's National Executive Board (NEB) adopted a statement on Comprehensive Workplace Immunization Programs and Mandatory Vaccinations. In this statement, **our union took a position in favour of reasonable mandatory vaccine policies in workplaces as one important tool, among others, to keep workers safe, to sustain a reopening of Canada's economy and put an end to this pandemic. We believe all Unifor members have a right to be safe at work and it is our union's duty to uphold that right.**

The NEB statement also makes clear that employer policies must accommodate for legitimate health exemptions, address personal privacy and data protection issues and uphold relevant human rights statutes – not unlike existing mandatory vaccine measures employed in Canada.

Representing our members

While we will continue to demand answers and changes to the D3 policy on vaccine mandates in the workplace, we also stress that members can seek guidance, support and representation from Unifor, their union.

For members who have legitimate human rights or medical reasons for not taking the vaccine, we will ensure that the employer policy has a plan for accommodation.

For members who choose to remain unvaccinated, or who refuse to disclose their vaccination status, the result of any challenges to the employer policy is unknown and will fall to arbitrators for decisions on the reasonableness of the policy.

We want our members to understand that there are direct consequences to choosing not to be vaccinated, where a reasonable policy is put in place. It would be irresponsible for us as a union not to ensure our members have all the facts about the risks to their employment. Indeed, part of our duty of representation is to be upfront and honest with our members about potential consequences to their jobs, regardless of the issue. This is not about “siding with the employer”. This is about having honest and transparent communications with our members, especially when it comes to the introduction of any reasonable workplace policy where non-compliance could potentially put our member’s employment at risk.

The union will review the proposed workplace vaccine mandate, negotiate with the employer to achieve improvements and ensure that the policy is reasonable for the context of our auto workplaces, and **we will respond to any individual disciplinary action taken on a case by case basis and through the normal local union grievance process.**

Towards ending the pandemic

We will continue to fight for the health and safety of all workers - for the right to a safe and healthy workplace, for the right to refuse unsafe work and for the right to speak out when employer policies breach the limits of what is reasonable.

We will also continue to support a global approach to public health, vaccine equity, workers’ voice and collaboration to bring this pandemic to an end. We will continue to inform our members, respond to the decisions and communications coming from employers in the auto sector, and, as always, strive for the safety and well-being of our members through these difficult times.

In solidarity,

Jerry Dias

Unifor National President



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