

Illogical election promises

by SAM ODROWSKI

In what appears to be an attempt to score political points, Liberal Party of Ontario leader, Ste-ven Del Duca is going against the advice of Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immun-ization (NACI).

He announced last week that he'll make COVID-19 vaccines mandatory to attend school for all students ? including those ages 5-11, flying in the face of the NACI's recommendation for kids.

?It is essential that children aged 5 to 11 years and their parents are supported and respected in their decisions regarding COVID-19 vaccinations for their children, whatever decisions they make, and are not stigmatised for accepting, or not accepting, the vaccination offer,? reads the NACI's recommendation.

I think it's safe to say a Del Duca Government would not respect parents' decision on this mat-ter and would in fact stigmatise them for not rushing to vaccinate their young kids.

And it's not a small number of children who would be impacted if Del Duca wins and this policy is implemented. Only 36 per cent of kids 5-11 have been vaccinated against COVID-19 in Ontar-io, which means a return to school may not happen for nearly 700,000 students.

Not to mention these policies impact already marginalized and vulnerable populations the most. According to Statistics Canada, only 56.4 per cent of Black people and 67.8 per cent of Métis people reported being very willing or somewhat willing to take the COVID-19 vaccine, compared to an 80 per cent average across the board.

While it's not uncommon for unvaccinated people to be smeared or shamed by politicians and mainstream media, it is predominately poor, non-white, and immigrant heavy neighbourhoods that have the lowest vaccination rates in Toronto and other cities.

If progressive political parties such as the Ontario Liberals want to be supportive of minorities and disenfranchised communities, barring them from attending school over medical decisions isn't the best look.

Del Duca says he's doing this because ?the science is settled? on vaccinating children but this is simply untrue when considering the NACI's recommendation that says parents' decisions should be respected on the issue.

And Public Health Ontario's own data on COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths by vac-cination status isn't very compelling for the settled science argument as well.

On May 14, 27 out of 107 or 25% of people in Ontario's ICUs for COVID-19 were unvaccinated. The remaining 80 were fully (68) and partially (12) vaccinated. While hospitalization data on the same day shows just 188 out of 1,148 admission (16%) to the hospital are unvaccinated and 84 per cent had one or more doses.

Sadly, the hospitalization numbers mirror vaccination rates in Ontario, which currently sit at 82 per cent. While there's slightly less vaccinated people per capita in ICUs, these numbers still aren't very reassuring for the efficacy of the jab of itself.

If the goal was to keep people out of the hospital by vaccinating them against COVID-19, it isn't exactly working as planned.

I get the sense that much of this mad rush to get kids vaccinated is due to misinformation around the impact COVID-19 can have on children.

Since March of 2020 when the pandemic officially started, 29 Canadians under 11 died with COVID-19, and while every life lost is a tragedy, it's important to contextualize the data.

There are over 4 million Canadians under 11 years old, which means 14.5 out of 4 million people in the age group have died of COVID-19 each year since 2020.

On average, 44 people drown in the bathtub and 180 are struck by lightning in Canada each year, many orders of magnitude higher than the COVID-19 death toll for kids. Yet, we don't mandate lightning safety or safe bathing courses for kids to attend school.

Context is also important for the risk of long COVID among kids, since this has been a key point for keeping restrictions on them through the pandemic.

A peer reviewed study out of the U.K show 97 per cent of children 5-11 recovered from COVID completely in four weeks and most of the remaining group fully recovered after eight weeks from lingering symptoms such as loss of smell or fatigue.

Two studies out of Europe determined rates of long COVID symptoms were almost the same between kids who tested positive for the virus and those who did not. This means other factors were to blame for their long-term symptoms in most of these cases, aside from COVID.

Despite all of this, for reasons I can't seem to understand, the Liberals are pressing forward with forcing parents to vaccinate their kids to keep them enrolled in school.

At a time when children have already suffered greatly from restrictions and a loss of normalcy due to COVID-19, Del Duca is only going to make matters worse.

It's time to change course.