



Jan. 25, 2021

John Horgan, Premier

Cc: Adrian Dix, Minister of Health

Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer

Dear Premier Horgan:

I am writing to you on behalf of the BC chapter of CAPE (Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment). We are a group of physicians involved with the intersection of human health and the environment. While we focus on the COVID-19 emergency, we cannot forget the climate emergency that threatens the planet and increases public health risk including factors related to pandemics. Our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic must bounce us forward in transition to a just and sustainable energy future while we end the pandemic.

We applaud the work of the Provincial Health Officer who on Dec. 29th took action to reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 spread from large industrial work sites to communities in the Northern Health Authority. The Order details the impacts of COVID-19 and the increase of cases in the Northern Health region caused by the transient nature of resource development workers. The order appropriately notes that, “A rapid return to full operating capacity on the part of large-scale industrial operations, with the attendant rapid return of large numbers of workers to the worksites and industrial camps, will likely further fuel and accelerate the cycle of transmission of COVID-19 among the workers and the surrounding communities.”

It is clear to us as health care workers that the entire province needs this protection now. The lives of oil and gas workers and Indigenous elders are being put at risk to protect an industry that does not have a bright future in the context of a climate emergency. The order should be strengthened, and expectations of industrial partners clarified. For example, there has been a rise in community COVID-19 cases due to the LNG Canada outbreaks in Kitimat, Valemont, Fort St. John and elsewhere. The Order does not provide adequate stop-work regulation, nor is it clear what criteria should be used to determine when it is safe to gradually return to work. Most

importantly, it ignores risks to communities in Interior, Island and Fraser Health Authorities and the province wide First Nations Health Authority.

Lack of action to halt industrial camp work has already resulted in rapid virus spread. Outbreaks in industrial camps are of particular concern, given the notable impacts on rural and remote, and particularly First Nations communities, that workers access. COVID -19 rates in Indigenous communities are increasing dangerously here in BC and across Canada. While work in these industrial camps is deemed an essential service, the movement of workers in and out of local First Nations communities is threatening the well-being of the community residents and the health and very existence of their elders, the vital keepers of traditional knowledge, language and culture. The Wet'suwet'en female chiefs have made their position on this point clear in their letter to Dr. Bonnie Henry asking that the oil and gas economy not come before Indigenous lives. Prioritizing Indigenous lives is at the very root of putting the province's commitment to reconciliation into practice.

To protect the health of all citizens of BC, we request that you issue a new order with greater clarity and broader scope to protect BC communities. It should include all construction worksites in the province with over 75 workers and other large industrial operations where workers put communities at risk for spread of the virus. Restart should be linked to COVID-19 infection data. Such metrics could include the ratio of positive tests divided by the total number of tests completed in the previous week, COVID-19 hospitalization rates, percent of ICU beds available in local communities and other clear indicators deemed useful by Public Health. More transparency on where infections are occurring will be required to achieve control.

Whereas four of "the Projects" (Coastal GasLink; Liquefied Natural Gas Canada; BC Hydro Site C; Rio Tinto Kemano) are exclusively in Northern Health, the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion (TMX) project is mainly in the Interior and Fraser Health regions and has no apparent restrictions. All sites where spread of the virus is enhanced by industrial operations should be included in the new order. The December focus on Northern Health was due to a combination of increasing infections and a lack of human and material resources to respond. Indeed, Northern Health is vulnerable to these issues, but First Nations and rural and remote communities across the province need protection through this policy on industrial camps, contact tracing, and vaccine delivery and administration.

As physicians, many of us are on the frontlines in the COVID-19 fight. We appreciate the tremendous efforts you are making for the health of British Columbians. We have, however, identified some substantial gaps; and would like to discuss the issues raised here with you or your staff as soon as possible.

Thanking you for your attention to this matter,

Dr. Larry Barzelai, MD, CCFP

On behalf of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment