



A Message to all Unionized Health Care Workers
The following is a joint message from NSGEU, NSNU, CUPE and Unifor:

Good afternoon,

The 24,000 health care members represented by our four unions have worked hard to protect Nova Scotians these past 17 months. Regardless of where you work or what you do in the acute care system – whether you are working in the labs, public health, or critical care and COVID units in your duties as administrative professionals, health care, nursing or support services, ensuring the safe operations of our hospitals – you have all earned the sincere admiration and appreciation of all Nova Scotians.

As unions, it is our job to ensure you are kept as safe as possible while you do this difficult work. All the unions representing you have had ongoing communications almost every day with provincial government representatives and with your employers. As COVID variants continue to challenge our health care system, we are learning each day about the new challenges you have to face.

The unions have informed the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) that we understand the priority right now is to ensure adequate staffing for the COVID units as they deal with the growing number of COVID patients requiring hospitalization and care. At the same time, **everything must be done to keep workers as safe as possible**. To that end, the unions want to inform our members of the following:

1. If you are assigned to a COVID unit and believe you require an N95 mask, but have not been provided one, you should approach your manager and ask for one;
2. It is the position of the unions that staff who are immunocompromised or who are pregnant should not be forced to be re-assigned to a COVID unit;
3. It is the position of the unions that people without **any** vaccinations who do not wish to be re-assigned to a covid unit should only be re-assigned as a last resort;
4. It is the position of the unions that health care workers who do not have a second vaccination and who work with COVID patients should be provided the second vaccination immediately.

The unions continue to work with the government and your employer on these issues and others.

If staff have reasonable grounds and are asked to work in an unsafe environment, they have the right to refuse that work under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. If you do choose to refuse, your employer is obligated to investigate your concerns and provide you with a remedy or advise you if they believe your refusal does not have merit. Either way, if you are not satisfied with the outcome of this reporting step, your refusal will stay active. The next step is to contact your Joint Occupational Health & Safety Committee, who will then investigate your refusal and provide the outcome of the committee's decision. If you are not satisfied with that outcome, you then have the option to escalate your refusal to the Department of Labour & Advanced Education, who will conduct their own investigation and issue a ruling. They can be reached at (902) 424-5400.

If you have any questions about your right to refuse unsafe work or about anything you are being asked to do contact your CUPE 8920 Area VP.