

evidence here in Ontario and across Canada.

The reality is that because of high vaccination rates among hospital workers and robust infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures, including frequent testing of any hospital worker who isn't vaccinated, only six out of Ontario's 141 hospital systems, or less than five per cent, currently have an active COVID-19 outbreak. Once identified, hospitals have protocols in place to effectively manage any outbreak to ensure that it is quickly contained, resolved, and has little if any impact on patient care. As an additional layer of protection, health care workers are now eligible to start booking their booster shots this Saturday.

At the same time, experience in other Canadian jurisdictions tells us that implementing a province-wide vaccine mandate for hospital workers can negatively impact the care patients receive. British Columbia has had to cancel surgeries and diagnostic tests because of the sudden termination of more than 3,000 health care workers after implementing a vaccine mandate. Quebec has now abandoned theirs altogether because of the significant risk an abrupt loss of thousands of health care workers poses to delivering critical services.

This is a complex issue. But when the impact of the potential departure of tens of thousands of health care workers is weighed against the small number of outbreaks that are currently active in Ontario's hospitals, I am not prepared to jeopardize the delivery of care to millions of Ontarians. Having looked at the evidence, our government has decided to maintain its flexible approach by leaving human resourcing decisions up to individual hospitals.

We will continue to monitor the situation in our hospitals very closely and take additional action if warranted. At this time, however, the evidence tells us that because of the measures currently in place, including vaccination rates, regular testing and rigorous IPAC practices, our hospitals remain safe for patients and staff members who care for them."