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(Thunder Bay, ON)

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VIEWPOINT

Hardline option is there, but other measures may work just as well

provincial human rights tribunals have recently echoed the point in explaining why vaccine hesitancy is not a trait protected against discrimination.

Nevertheless, political reluctance to mandate a newly approved vaccine as a condition of attending school is understandable. A hard mandate may be needed if the threat of COVID-19 suddenly surges, but for now, the focus should likely be on softer strategies that promote childhood vaccination.

First, all efforts should be made to make vaccination convenient for those who want it, by ensuring easy access within schools themselves, following up to ensure second doses are received, and requiring employers to give time off work to parents taking their kids for shots.

From there, provincial governments could empower schools to require that students register their vaccination status but allow the unvaccinated to attend except in the event of an outbreak. This approach has the benefit of minimizing or even eliminating school closures for those who have been vaccinated. Mean-

while, the prospect of being sent home for school for days or weeks at a time may provide the incentives needed for many to get vaccinated.

If our primary aim is to incentivize vaccination, the provinces have another option at their disposal: like adults, younger people could be required to show proof of vaccination when entering non-essential settings like restaurants and movie theatres.

Whatever policy path is chosen, we should be developing and refining policy options now regarding childhood vaccination, and in the process, dispelling legal misinformation. Too often our pandemic response has involved postponing difficult policy decisions to the eleventh hour, and then scrambling to implement solutions as case counts grow out of control.

Colleen M. Flood, Bryan Thomas and Kumanan Wilson are all members of the University of Ottawa Centre for Health Law Policy & Ethics. Column courtesy of Quoi Media Group (quoiimedia.com).