



Canada to scale back vaccine mandates

Description

CANADA: The government in Ottawa said it will drop vaccine requirements for federal workers and domestic travelers

Canada is set to lift a series of vaccine mandates for travelers and government employees, reversing course on controversial policies that triggered mass nationwide protests earlier this year.

The mandates will be phased out on June 20, meaning unvaccinated federal personnel and certain transportation employees can return to work, while Canadians traveling domestically will no longer have to show proof of vaccination, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs Dominic LeBlanc told reporters on Tuesday.

"Today's announcement is possible because Canadians have stepped up to protect each other," LeBlanc said. *"We are now able to adjust our policy because we have followed consistently the best advice from public health authorities."*

While immunization rules for domestic trains and airlines will no longer apply as of next Monday, they will remain in place on cruise ships. Foreigners arriving in Canada will also still have to show proof of vaccination, and returning citizens must undergo quarantine.

LeBlanc went on to warn that the mandates could be revived should Canada face another Covid-19 surge, saying: *"If the situation takes a turn for the worse, we are prepared to bring back the policies necessary to protect Canadians."*

"We don't regret at all being cautious when it comes to a virus that has tragically killed tens of thousands of Canadians and millions of people around the world," he added.

First introduced last October, the vaccine requirements have proven unpopular for a large segment of the population, and prompted a wave of raucous protests last winter, during which convoys of long-haul truckers organized blockades at border crossings and in Ottawa itself.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who drew much of the criticism over the mandates, took a tough line on the unrest, invoking emergency powers to disperse demonstrators while accusing organizers of seeking to overthrow the government.

The Covid-19 policies have also come under fire from Trudeau's Conservative critics, as well as members of his own Liberal Party, with one backbench lawmaker blaming the premier for *"politicization of the pandemic"* in February, which he said *"risks undermining the public's trust in our public health institutions."*

In addition to dropping the vaccine rules, the federal government announced last week that it would suspend random coronavirus tests at Canadian airports. While it noted the tests would resume on July 1, they will be carried out 'off-site' after that date, allowing airports to dismantle dedicated testing facilities taking up space in common areas.

"It's going to make sure that the airports flow more quickly. The airports aren't designed to be mini health care centers and so this will help with staff, it'll help with congestion," Tourism Minister Randy Boissonault said of the decision. *"This is a good step in the right direction."*

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