



December 15, 2014

Mr. Mike Del Grande, Board Chair
Toronto Catholic District School Board
80 Sheppard Avenue East
Toronto ON M2N 6E8

Dear Mr. Del Grande

Centre For Inquiry Canada is a registered Canadian charity with the mission

to provide education and training to the public in the application of skeptical, secular, rational and humanistic inquiry through conferences, symposia, lectures, published works and the maintenance of a library.

In pursuit of our mission, we communicate on behalf of our members when issues of science or secularism are brought to our attention. Particularly, CFI Canada is concerned when faith-based and not science-based thinking is used in the formation of policy involving human rights, education and health of vulnerable people.

Recently, a CFI Canada member brought to our attention some troubling comments you made regarding HPV vaccines – specifically an article from the *Toronto Star* by Alex Ballingall published on December 3, 2014. It is our understanding, based on this article, that you perceive HPV vaccinations as a moral rather than a public health issue.

As an educational charity, we offer to present to you and your fellow Board members an educational presentation regarding HPV vaccinations and how your board may avoid becoming a vector of public health hazards.

Mr. Del Grande, **the efficacy of vaccines is wholly a public health issue and not a moral one.** HPV vaccines protect against the viruses which are the major causes of cervical (70%), anal (80%) and vaginal (60%) cancers and offer significant protection against several other types. It is also known that when the vaccine is disallowed that a significant decrease in immunization rate is the result, as was apparent when the Calgary Catholic School Board refused to administer the HPV vaccine in its schools. The vaccination rate of students in Catholic schools was far lower (less than 20%) compared to students attending public schools (70%).

A letter from several representatives of Catholic Church authorities and distributed to parents of Catholic school students in 2012 (and distributed again this past September in Calgary Catholic schools) stated,

Although school-based immunization delivery systems generally result in high numbers of students completing immunization, a school-based approach to vaccination sends a message that early sexual intercourse is allowed.

This implies a fear on the part of Catholic authorities that accompanying HPV vaccinations would be a rise in sexual activity in teens. But as peer-reviewed scientific studies have clearly demonstrated, one published as recently as December 8th in the journal of the Canadian Medical Association, **vaccination against HPV does not result in increased sexual activity in teens**. Thus, the fear expressed in the letter is patently unfounded. This is not surprising since none of its authors has relevant expertise in public health or the social sciences.

We also know from numerous studies that abstinence-only sex education fails utterly in its goal to eliminate pre-marital sex. Indeed, these programs have been shown to lead to increased rates of teen pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases, including HPV infection.

From the above information we can conclude that the effect of disallowing HPV vaccinations is predictable: an unnecessary risk of cancer for young people with no measureable benefit in curtailing premarital sex.

Vaccines, no matter what they are used to inoculate against, are not a moral issue - they are a public health issue. As such, the views of Catholic theological authority are not relevant and need not be sought.

What *is* morally questionable is for authorities entrusted with the welfare of students to consider creating a public health hazard by withholding or blocking distribution of an effective vaccine. The real message being sent with such considerations is not that "sexual intercourse is not allowed," it is that Catholic authorities are ready and willing to place the health and lives of young citizens at risk in an attempt to enforce dogma.

We need to educate young people, not disrespect them. Rather than using potential future harm as a form of coercive control, you should be seeking to give students the life-long skills and knowledge they require to make informed decisions for themselves.

Since Catholic school systems in Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan receive public money, Catholic school boards in these provinces should have no expectation that such a decision will be solely theirs. From a public health perspective, it is our position that there is no argument against making the HPV vaccine available to students in schools. We should be concerned first and foremost with the health and welfare of those we are charged to protect, and distributing vaccines in schools has long been known to be the most effective way in which to protect our youngest and most vulnerable against disease.

Should you require additional information regarding HPV or how the TCDSB can avoid being a vector of public health hazards, please feel free to contact me at ned@cficanada.ca or at our office, 416-971-5676.

Sincerely



Eric Adriaans

National Executive Director

CFI Canada

cc CFI Canada Members, Alex Ballingall