

Quebec to levy financial penalty on unvaccinated adults

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A woman walks by a closed store in a mall in Montreal, Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Canada. Some measures put in place by the Quebec government, including the closure of stores, go into effect today to help curb the spread of COVID-19 in the province. Credit: Graham Hughes /The Canadian Press via AP

The premier of the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec announced Tuesday that adult residents who refuse to get vaccinated against the coronavirus will be charged a financial penalty.

Premier Francois Legault said not getting vaccinated leads to consequences for the health care system and not all Quebecers should pay for that.

He said the levy will apply only to people who do not qualify for medical exemptions. It is the first time a government in Canada has announced a financial penalty for people who refuse to be vaccinated in the pandemic.

Legault said the amount of the penalty hasn't been decided, but will be "significant." More details will be released at a later date.

He said about 10% of adults in Quebec are unvaccinated, but they represent about 50% of intensive care patients.

"Those who refuse to get their first doses in the coming weeks will have to pay a new health contribution," Legault said.

"The majority are asking that there be consequences. ... It's a question of fairness for the 90% of the population that have made some sacrifices. We owe them."

Quebec previously announced a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew. Quebec liquor and cannabis stores will also require proof of vaccination to enter starting Jan. 18 and the government has warned that shopping malls and hair salons could soon require vaccine passports. Appointments for first doses jumped immediately after.

Quebec reported 62 more deaths related to COVID-19, the sometimes

fatal illness that can be caused by the coronavirus. That raised the province's COVID-19 deaths to 12,028, the most in Canada.

Some European countries have started levying fees on their citizens who are not vaccinated.

In Greece, people older than 60 have until Sunday to get their first coronavirus shots or be fined 100 euros (\$113) for every month they remain unvaccinated.

Austria's health minister announced last month the government plans to impose fines of up to 3,600 euros (\$4,000) on people who flout a coronavirus vaccine mandate that it aims to introduce in February for all residents age 14 and over.

In Italy, residents 50 and older are required to be vaccinated, and beginning in mid-February those failing to do so will face fines as high as 1,600 euros (\$1,800) if they enter their workplaces.

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