

Vaccination required for those of age involved with minor hockey



By Nate Smelle

In light of the Ford government's decision to make it mandatory for people to present a COVID-19 vaccine certificate proving full vaccination in order to access certain public settings and facilities, on Sept. 27 Hockey Eastern Ontario announced that it was aligning its own policies with the provincial regulations.

This means that anyone born on or before 2009 will now be required to provide proof of full COVID-19 vaccination before participating in the sport.

The HEO's list of those now required to show their COVID-19 vaccination certificate includes: players born in 2009 or earlier; game officials, such as referees, linespersons, and timekeepers; HEO officials (Directors and employees of HEO); organization officials (Association and league executives, district executives, and employees); team officials, such as coaches, trainers, managers, and equipment personnel; and volunteers serving in any other capacity.

With the long-awaited 2021/2022 hockey season about to get underway, local hockey players, parents, coaches, staff, volunteers, and fans are wondering how the new provincial regulations will affect their return to the rink. Bancroft and District Minor Hockey president Marc Gibson explained that they have been directed by the Ontario Minor Hockey Association to follow the rules it has establish in line with the provincial regulations. Expressing how excited he is to see the return of minor hockey in Bancroft, he said they are optimistically expecting to play as normal, and as full of a season as possible.

Noting how this season has already started off in a different manner than a 'non-COVID' year, Gibson said associations like the BDMHA could not start their own try-outs for rep hockey, until AAA, AA, and A tryouts were completed. While this delay has left many with the feeling of being behind at the start of the hockey season, he said in reality they are on track to start the season at the end of October.

'The OMHA has taken it upon themselves to take an extra step with safeguarding our on-ice participants,' said Gibson. 'They have required through their own policy that all persons 12 years or older involved with the team activities including players, coaching staff, volunteers, referees, etc, be fully vaccinated by Oct. 31. This policy has created relief to those who are in support of the vaccination approach to combat the spread of COVID-19 but has also created unrest in the community of people who don't believe that the COVID-19 vaccine is the best thing for their family. We are trying to be as supportive as possible to all involved with hockey in Bancroft, but ultimately once the OMHA policy is fully in play at the end of October, we will have to restrict who can participate on the team.'

As it stands this year, Gibson said the BDMHA is currently looking at a 10-15 per cent decrease in registered players as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. Reiterating how this is not a 'normal' start to the hockey season, he said they are hopeful that these safeguards prevent any type of shutdowns that would break up this season as it did last year.