

“Freedom Convoy” Protesters

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Who are the Freedom Convoy protesters and what are they protesting?

As of January 15, the federal government had implemented a proof-of-vaccination mandate for all truckers entering Canada from the US. On January 23, they then began requiring all non-American cross-boarder truckers entering the United States to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as well. If they are not vaccinated, they would require a quarantine of 14 days. In response to this mandate, truckers from across the country have been heading to the nation’s capital in protest, as many feel that truckers should not be required to get the COVID-19 vaccines. The convoy left from British Columbia on January 23, with other provinces joining along the way.

In a change that is adding pressure to the already strained supply chain, some are stating that we could be facing shortages of many essential items in the coming weeks as the protests continue. However, Trudeau has said “I regret that the Conservative Party and Conservative politicians are in the process of stoking Canadians’ fears about the supply chain. The reality is that vaccination is how we’ll get through this.”

The Canadian Trucking Alliance has also issued a statement saying it does not support and "strongly disapproves" of any protests on roadways, highways and bridges.

Where are the protesters now?

The convoy made its way across the country to Ottawa, Ontario, with people reaching their destination as early as January 29, and more have continued to arrive every day since. The protesters have consumed the downtown core, making it difficult for locals to get through the streets. The incessant noise has also caused many to go without sleep and has caused numerous 911 calls and disruptions to emergency services. Ottawa police are anticipating the "Freedom Convoy" to grow again by this weekend as more demonstrators have continued to show up. Emergency services are concerned that even with a large police presence, that the protest will not be brought to an end.

Acting deputy chief Trish Ferguson said that most of the demonstrators who were in the city over last weekend have left and what remains is "a highly-determined and highly-dedicated group of unlawful individuals." To date, there have been no serious injuries, no deaths, and no riots as a result of police enforcement. In the wake of many social media posts arising, we are seeing more and more concerning images coming into focus. What began as a seemingly peaceful protest, is now turning into a concerning portrayal of white supremacy, with confederate flags and other hateful symbols hanging off the tail end of many of the convoy attendees' vehicles. This is something that is not a regular sight in Canada, so many residents of Ottawa and throughout the rest of the country have voiced their concerns.

Trucks remain on Wellington Street in downtown Ottawa as of today, although the number of demonstrators is dwindling. Police said Tuesday night about 250 remained on and around Parliament Hill. Organizers of the protest say they plan to stay "as long as it takes for freedom to be restored."

Are there any updates on the possibility of protests within the city of Toronto?

In the wake of the ever-changing convoy, we are now seeing recommendations from Toronto hospitals suggesting that staff wear plain clothing when coming into work this coming weekend, as protests are expected to take place outside of medical facilities as protesters move towards the downtown core of the city.

The Mount Sinai Academic Family Health Team issued a notice on Thursday afternoon saying all its primary care appointments will be conducted virtually from Friday to end of day on Monday.

The notice stated, “We have been made aware of plans for a protest at Queen’s Park in Toronto involving a convoy of transport trucks beginning, Given Mount Sinai’s close proximity to Queen’s Park, we are monitoring the situation closely and making plans should the protest limit access to the hospital. The safety of our patients and staff is our top priority.”

The Women’s College Hospital sent out a memo on Thursday afternoon, saying they are keeping an eye on the situation and that security will be present at the hospital all weekend.

“While this is a rapidly evolving situation, the safety of our staff, physicians, learners and patients, as the security of the hospital site, are paramount,” the memo stated. “We have established the hospital emergency operations committee as a Code Orange stage 1 to place us on standby.” Access to the hospital will be limited, and “out of an abundance of caution, the hospital said it will close its COVID-19 assessment centre on Saturday and Sunday”. The hospital’s Family Practise Health Centre will also cancel its urgent care clinic on Saturday.

SickKids sent out a similar memo advising that staff "should wear street clothes when coming to the hospital – not clothing which identifies them as a hospital worker." It also stated workers should have their hospital badge with them at all times.

Health Minister Christine Elliott said in a tweet on Thursday evening that any "intimidation" of health-care workers or their patients "will not be tolerated."

I heard that there is a GoFundMe set up for the cause, what is this money being used for?

As of January 25, the protesters had raised \$3.5 million from around 46,000 donors in support of the efforts. As we entered into the month of February, it had amassed upwards of \$10 million, and GoFundMe has now made a statement saying that they have paused the fundraising campaign and it is currently under review to see if it complies with their terms of service. The

campaign stated that the funds would be used “to help with the costs of fuel first, and hopefully food and lodgings to help ease the pressures of this arduous task.” However, now with a total of over 10 million dollars, the purpose for and use of these funds has not yet been properly determined.

There have been some reports of individuals who have made donations themselves receiving refunds already, but there has been no official notice from the funding site regarding these accounts.

We at North Yorkers for Disabled Persons agree that in a democratic society, people have the right to protest. However, the lines are becoming blurred on what the ultimate goal for this convoy is, as more and more non-truckers have continued to take part in the demonstration. We are unsure of what will happen moving forward, but we will update our website with any new information once it is available.

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Sources:

- 1: [Toronto hospitals suggest that staff wear plainclothes when coming into work due to weekend 'Freedom Convoy' | CTV News](#)
- 2: [Freedom Convoy: Ottawa police expect protest to grow this weekend | CTV News](#)
- 3: [Majority of truckers are vaccinated, Trudeau says, as 'freedom convoy' heads to Ottawa - National | Globalnews.ca](#)
- 4: [Truckers heading to Ottawa to protest vaccine mandate | CTV News](#)
- 5: [GoFundMe pauses donations to 'Freedom Convoy 2022' as funds exceed \\$10M \(citynews.ca\)](#)