FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:
COVID-19 VACCINATION ROLL OUT

Last revised: January 25, 2021

WHEN WILL VACCINES BE AVAILABLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

We are currently working through Phase One of Ontario’s three-phased implementation plan, which includes the immunization of health care workers, essential caregivers, long-term care home and retirement home residents, and First Nation communities and urban Indigenous populations, including Métis and Inuit adults. Once this group has been immunized we will move into Phase Two as quickly as we can, depending upon the arrival of the vaccine.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHILE I WAIT TO GET MY VACCINE?

It’s important to note that it will be several months until a vaccine is available to the general public and receiving the vaccine does not mean an individual can stop any of the other prevention measures until we are clear about how effective the vaccines are at preventing COVID-19 transmission. We must all continue to do our part to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in the community: limit your close contacts to those within your household, practice physical distancing, wear a mask, wash your hands, stay home except for essential reasons and follow local and provincial guidance.

WHO HAS BEEN VACCINATED TO DATE?

All eligible long-term care (LTC) workers and residents along with some essential caregivers in Simcoe Muskoka have received their first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Immunization of this first group began on December 22, 2020. With the provincial direction that the Pfizer vaccine could be safely transported, immunization of long-term care residents began on January 11th. The health unit’s Mobile Immunization Clinic team, in collaboration with Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre, vaccinated 3,545 people in 30 LTC homes in less than a week.

The next phase of vaccine roll-out, which began the weekend of January 23, includes more than 3,000 residents in the region’s 52 retirement homes.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN VACCINATED SO FAR?

We update those numbers on our HealthSTATS page Monday to Friday.

The provincial task force is using an ethical framework and the best available data to identify other priority populations within this phase, based on available vaccine supply.
WHO WILL GET THEIR SHOT NEXT?

Phase 2 of Ontario’s implementation plan calls for the immunization of older adults, beginning with those older than 80 years, and decreasing in five-year increments over the course of the vaccine roll out. It also includes:

- people who live and work in high-risk congregate settings (for example, shelters, community living)
- frontline essential workers, including first responders, teachers and other education staff and the food processing industry
- individuals with high-risk chronic conditions and their caregivers
- other populations and communities facing barriers related to the determinants of health across Ontario who are at greater COVID-19 risk.

HOW DO I GET MY SHOT?

The priority for vaccinations is determined by the provincial implementation plan, which is a three-phased approach based on those at highest risk. The public will be notified via local media when it is time for them to make an appointment.

WHO IS DOING THE VACCINATIONS?

Vaccinations of those in the first priority group were being offered at the COVID-19 Immunization Clinic at 29 Sperling Drive in Barrie. Initially this clinic was a partnership between SMDHU, RVH and the City of Barrie, however with the roll out of immunization to LTC residents by the health unit’s Mobile Immunization Clinic team, RVH has assumed leadership of the Sperling Drive clinic.

WHAT ARE IMMUNIZERS DOING TO ENSURE NO EXTRA DOSES OF THE VACCINE ARE WASTED AT THE END OF THE DAY?

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is a technically challenging vaccine and once a vial has been opened, all doses within it must be used within a certain timeframe (there are no preservatives in this vaccine). When a clinic is arranged with a facility, we do our best to only bring out the number of doses required for that clinic. Often we are able to get extra doses of vaccine from the vials. For this reason wait lists are kept of those eligible to receive the vaccine (i.e. other healthcare workers, essential caregivers). In the event extra doses become available individuals are contacted to attend the clinic to be immunized.

WHY IS IT TAKING SO LONG TO VACCINATE PEOPLE?

The greatest challenge at this point is supply of the vaccine. We are currently vaccinating as quickly as we can, going through the priority groups the province has set. A temporary interruption in the supply of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine means that deliveries of the vaccine are reduced for Canada in the coming weeks, which will greatly impact the amount of vaccine we will receive locally in February.
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ARE YOU GOING TO BE HOLDING COMMUNITY CLINICS?

While we don’t have definitive plans in place just yet, it’s fair to say that all options are on the table. The health unit is currently planning with community partners and will be looking at ways to ensure everyone who wants to be vaccinated can be, as quickly as possible and in a location convenient to them. Those could include community clinics, expanded mobile clinics, and clinics offered by our partners, including family physicians, hospitals and pharmacies.

WHEN WILL EVERYONE BE VACCINATED?

Our goal is to have as many individuals vaccinated as quickly as possible. We have currently redeployed all of the nurses within our organization that we can to this effort, and have been vaccinating seven days a week to reach our goal. However, our efforts are also dependent upon the availability of the vaccine.

HOW IS THE HEALTH UNIT GOING TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE GETS THE VACCINE – THIS IS A MASSIVE PROJECT?

Planning for the immunization of all of our residents is underway with our healthcare partners in the community, including: public health, primary care, hospitals, pharmacies, long term care and paramedic services (both from Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka), First Nations communities and urban/rural Indigenous populations, the Local Health Integration Networks, and the Central Region of Ontario Health. The Simcoe-Muskoka COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign Advisory Committee, as it is known, will advise on the planning and coordination of the mass vaccination campaign against COVID-19 for the weeks and months to come. The first meeting of the committee was held January 13, and more information about the committee can be found here.

This group will provide advice to the health unit on how to plan and implement the vaccine roll-out in an efficient, equitable and ethical way over the next weeks and months. One of its tasks was to provide input into a Simcoe Muskoka vaccination plan that was being prepared for submission to the province on January 20.

As well, we have launched an online form on our COVID-19 vaccination webpage to collect the names and information of people who would like to volunteer at clinics or are interested in immunization positions at the health unit. This list will be managed by Human Resources and individuals will be contacted as needed.

IS THE HEALTH UNIT GOING TO DELAY GIVING PEOPLE THE SECOND DOSE OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Yes, in order to vaccinate as many people in the highest risk groups as possible with the current supply of vaccine The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) approved delaying the second doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for up to 42 days.
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Recent evidence has shown that the second dose of vaccine can be delayed beyond the 21 day approved schedule by Pfizer and that that people continue to have a high level of protection (85%) for at least 11 to 21 days after receiving their first dose, so good protection is anticipated to continue beyond 21 days.

The report from NACI stated that while the ideal is to follow the vaccine manufacturers’ recommendations (which is 21 days for Pfizer and 28 days for Moderna), people can wait for up to 42 days or so for the second dose in order to allow more people to get some partial protection by receiving their first shot faster.

I FOUND THIS CANADIAN VACCINE QUEUE CALCULATOR LINKED FROM ANOTHER HEALTH UNIT’S WEBSITE, CAN I USE THIS TO DETERMINE WHEN I WILL GET MY SHOT?

The calculator gives a very general idea based on information about how many doses are set to be delivered and administered in the months to come, and what population group you are in and when that group is eligible based on priority. We will continue to update the public with more specific timelines when we can.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE TO GO THROUGH THE DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS?

The speed in which we can immunize our community really depends on the supply of vaccine to our region.

WHAT VACCINES ARE BEING USED RIGHT NOW, AND ARE THERE OTHERS AVAILABLE?

We are currently vaccinating our residents with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. We are awaiting notification from the province regarding our first shipment of the Moderna vaccine. When this does occur, our health unit will lead the distribution of this vaccine to priority groups in the community. As additional vaccines are approved by Health Canada, vaccination and distribution will be expanded to other priority groups and eventually the general public.