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COVID-19 Vaccine: Update #39

Deferral of School Immunization Program, Third Doses for Remaining Retirement Homes, Third Doses for Those on Specific Immunosuppressants and Medical Exemptions for COVID-19 Vaccination

Attention: Physicians, Emergency Departments, Hospital CEOs, Hospital Laboratories, Infection Control Practitioners, Occupational Health Practitioners, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, Nurse and Nurse Practitioners, EMS, Designated Officers, Midwives, Family Health Teams, Pharmacies, Central LHIN, NSM LHIN, Beausoleil First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Rama First Nation, Wahta First Nation, Long-term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, Hospices, Coroners, Funeral Directors, Dentists, Group Homes, Homes for Special Care, Optometrists, Corrections, Municipalities, Licensed Child Care Providers

Date: October 15, 2021

School-Based Clinics for Grade 7 Vaccines Not Proceeding

With the ongoing and anticipated increase in demand expected in the coming months for COVID-19 vaccination, we have made the difficult decision to not proceed with the School-Based Immunization Program for Grades 7 and 8 for Hepatitis B, Meningococcal and Human Papillomavirus (HPV). As has been necessary throughout the pandemic, we are needing to shift resources to protect our community from COVID-19, which remains the top provincial priority for vaccination efforts. The health unit's Immunization program will continue to support COVID-19 vaccination for those eligible for third doses, along with planning for immunization of 5 to 11 year-olds so we are prepared to implement this when approval is received to do so. When we originally started planning for fall, it was thought that 5 to 11 year-olds would likely not be eligible until early 2022, but indications are now that this could be as soon as November.

Students who are in Grade 7 currently will be vaccinated next school year when in Grade 8, using a similar model we had planned to use this year where we would vaccinate both Grade 7 and 8 students at school-based clinics. As soon as we are in a position to offer catch-up opportunities for students currently in Grade 8 and those in Grade 9, we will communicate with schools and families to ensure that students can receive these vaccines. For students who do not want to wait to receive these vaccines, their primary care provider can order the school program vaccines using the Temporary Grade 7 Vaccine Order Form for [Barrie/Midland/Collingwood/Cookstown](#) and [Gravenhurst/Huntsville/Orillia](#).

Third Doses for Remaining Retirement Homes and Seniors Living in Congregate Settings

Last week the Ministry announced that the remaining retirement homes and seniors congregate living settings (defined as primarily 65+ with shared common living spaces like kitchens and living spaces) are



now eligible for third doses at the same 5-month interval that was used for long term care homes and higher risk retirement homes. We will start outreach with each of these facilities early next week to determine what supports they need to ensure their residents are offered third doses.

Eligibility for Those on Specific Immunosuppressant Drugs for Third Doses

The Ministry updated the [COVID-19 Vaccine Third Dose Recommendations](#) guidance last week indicating that those who are taking specific immunosuppressant drugs (refer to pages 5-8) can now receive their third dose by taking their prescription to a pharmacy or clinic (29 Sperling Drive in Barrie or pop-up clinic), rather than needing a referral form completed by their specialist. Those who are not taking one of the drugs included on this list will continue to need a referral form from their specialist.

Medical Exemptions for COVID-19 Vaccination

Today the [province launched](#) the new enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code that people can download to their phone or print as a hard copy to gain access to designated settings. Work is underway to integrate medical exemptions into this system. Once this is ready provincially, those with medical exemptions will be able to obtain a QR code as well. Once this occurs, those with valid medical exemptions will be required to submit their documentation to public health for verification and uploading to the COVAX system. They will then be able to receive a QR code to use for entrance into designated settings. In the interim, hard copy proof will continue to be accepted.

When the functionality to include medical exemptions is launched provincially, those with medical exemptions will be required to present their documentation along with photo ID at a local public health office. Reception staff will take a photocopy of their ID and their documentation and submit it to the Immunization team for review. Immunization staff will verify that the exemption meets the criteria outlined in the [Ministry Guidance Document Medical Exemptions to COVID-19 Vaccination](#). For any medical exemptions that are not valid, the issuing health care provider will be notified and will need to follow up with the patient to inform them.

For immunization program information, support materials and forms refer to our website

www.smdhu.org/pcportal or call the Immunization program, Monday thru Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at 705-721-7520 or toll free 1-877-721-7520 ext. 8806.

Additional COVID-19 Vaccine Information

For more information about the rollout of COVID-19 vaccine in our area, please refer to the SMDHU [COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunization](#) webpages.

For more information on the province's three-phased vaccine distribution implementation plan, please visit [COVID-19 vaccines for Ontario](#).

There are a number of COVID-19 resources and documents available through our Health Professional Portal at www.smdhu.org/hpportal as well as through [Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Government of Ontario](#).