

## Long-term care staff accepting vaccines at a rate of less than 70%: Region

As COVID-19 vaccinations resume this week to select demographics at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex after a temporary shutdown, efforts continue to roll out the vaccines to retirement and long-term care homes.

But vaccine hesitancy is an issue that needs to be overcome, according to Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health.

At a special meeting of Regional Council held last Thursday, Dr. Kurji told lawmakers that while the aim is to vaccinate at least 70 per cent of our population against COVID-19 in order to achieve 'herd immunity,' there have been some stumbling blocks.

'Should the variant become the dominant strain, we would need to build up vaccine rates of about 85 per cent to develop that herd immunity,' said Dr. Kurji. 'Looking at our current experience in long-term care, staff have only been accepting the vaccine to a level of between 50 and 69 per cent. Residents have been vaccinated to the extent of over 90 per cent.'

At the end of the weekend, Aurora closed in on 40 fatalities related to COVID-19, the vast majority of which have taken place in long-term care and retirement settings. That threshold was crossed in an announcement made by Public Health on Tuesday afternoon.

The 39th fatality was announced by York Region Public Health on Sunday evening: an 89-year-old man who succumbed to the virus on Friday, January 22 after first testing positive on December 24 and experiencing his first system on January 3. A resident of Kingsway Place Retirement Residence in Aurora, he died at Barrie's Royal Victoria Health Centre.

The 40th fatality, a 74-year-old man, occurred Friday, February 4, at Southlake Regional Health Centre and attributed to an ongoing outbreak at the hospital. He first tested positive on January 24 and, according to York Region Public Health, was asymptomatic.

At press time this week, Aurora had seen a total of 886 cases of COVID-19, 822 of which are now marked as recovered. 24 cases remain active, the lowest number of active infections recorded in 2021 thus far.

Of the active cases, 19 are attributed to local transmission or close contact, 3 to institutional outbreak, and 2 to workplace cluster.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter