

Public Health encourages youth to get boosters with expanded eligibility

Youth between the ages of 12 to 17 are now eligible to receive their COVID-19 booster following expanded eligibility from the Provincial Government.

The expansion was announced last Monday as part of the Province's accelerated reopening plan.

Now that capacity limits have been lifted in many venues, the next steps are slated to come into effect on March 1, including the lifting of all capacity limits in indoor public settings that have not already had their capacity limits lifted.

The Province will also lift proof-of-vaccination requirements for all settings at this time, allowing businesses and other settings the option of choosing to require proof-of-vaccination in their own settings.

Youth between the ages of 12 and 17 can receive a booster dose six months or 168 days after the receipt of their second dose, said Dr. Richard Gould, Associate Medical Officer of Health for the Region of York on Monday. Please don't hesitate to walk into any York Region Public Health Clinic for your vaccine. With 89 per cent of York Region residents aged 12 plus having two doses, there is no reason to hold back on receiving your booster dose now.

York Region Public Health and partner vaccination clinics, as well as many local pharmacies currently have capacity to provide first, second and booster doses to all who are eligible. Recent Ontario studies show that the booster dose is 95 per cent effective in preventing hospitalization or severe illness from Omicron, which is substantially higher than just two doses. Booster doses are a key to reopening our community and we strongly recommend everyone who is eligible to get a booster dose as soon as possible.

But that reopening, he said, must be done in consideration of the fact that the Omicron variant is still transmissible in the community.

This past week, we continued to see a decrease in hospitalizations and ICU admissions, which is very encouraging news. The burden on our hospital and healthcare system, however, is still quite high and we need to remain cautious as we further re-open. Last week, restrictions in Ontario were lifted earlier than expected because of the progress we have made with vaccinations and your continued sacrifices. With an increase in gathering limits and capacity in public spaces, I want to remind everyone that while this is great news for our mental wellbeing and our economy, we have to remain cautious. Omicron is still transmissible and we must continue to follow the public health measures that remain in place like wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing where you can.

Thanks to these measures, we have been able to fast track the re-opening of our community. Lifting restrictions further and eliminating the Proof of Vaccination where businesses choose to do so are planned as of March 1. This ambitious reopening plan depends on continued improvements in health care and public health indicators, and our collective willingness to continue following public health advice. Remain at home if you're showing any COVID-19-like symptoms. We know this is frustrating to hear, but we all want to see the end of this pandemic so we can continue to move forward and return to a type of normalcy in our communities.

LOCAL STATS

As of Tuesday, February 22, Aurora was experiencing 16 confirmed active cases of COVID-19, according to York Region Public Health.

But, as the Region notes, this number is an under-estimate of the real number.

With rapid transmission of Omicron and recent provincial changes in testing eligibility and case management, case counts and outbreaks reported through the COVID-19 in York Region interactive dashboard are an under-estimate of the true number of

individuals with COVID-19 and outbreaks in York Region, the Region stated at the start of January, adding case counts should be treated with caution. Public Health units across Ontario are prioritizing case management of high-risk individuals and settings. Workplace outbreaks are no longer reported.

The Region is no longer reporting source of exposure for active cases.

Since the start of the global pandemic, York Region Public Health had been able to confirm 4,195 PCR-confirmed cumulative cases of COVID-19 in Aurora as of February 22. 4,118 cases are now marked as resolved. There have been 61 fatalities attributed to the virus.

The 61st victim confirmed by York Region Public Health was an 85-year-old woman who was exposed to the virus in an institutional outbreak at Southlake Regional Health Centre. She died Thursday, February 17 after first testing positive on February 2. She was asymptomatic.

89.5 per cent of Aurora residents aged 5 and up have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 86.8 per cent had received two doses by the start of the week.

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