

York Region 'ready to deliver' vaccines to kids aged 5 to 11

York Region is ready to roll out vaccines to children between the ages of five and eleven this week, according to Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's newly-appointed Medical Officer of Health.

In his first update on the local fight against the virus, Dr. Pakes, whose appointment was announced by the Region of York on Friday, said the recent approval of a COVID-19 vaccine for kids in that age bracket was an 'exciting development' in making COVID a thing of the past.

'Last Friday, Health Canada authorized the COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5 to 11 years old, followed by recommendations from Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) on how to best roll out these vaccines to this group,' he said. 'York Region is ready to deliver these vaccines into arms as soon as we receive shipment from the Province. This is another great step towards ending this pandemic and helping keep our communities safe and healthy. There are 91,000 children in this age group and we have been working together with our community and health system partners for many weeks to ensure your children can get the vaccines as soon as possible in a place that is convenient and comfortable for them.'

York Region Public Health began booking appointments for kids five years of age and older on Tuesday morning and the first doses of the new vaccine were expected to roll out by the end of the week. Appointments for this phase of the vaccine rollout must be booked in advance.

'The paediatric Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine your children will receive as part of this campaign has a lower dosage than the adolescent and adult Pfizer vaccine, is administered in two doses, and the second dose being offered eight weeks after the first dose. While children generally have had mild COVID-19 illness, there have been over 300 hospitalizations here in Canada and quite a few deaths around the world.

'It is critically important to protect our children. This vaccine will protect children not only from illness, but more importantly for many parents - and once your children are fully vaccinated, they will not need to isolate if they are exposed to COVID-19 and they will be able to gather safely and continue to attend in-person school, including extra-curricular activities.'

York Region Public Health, he added, is working with local school boards to host school-based clinics starting in December and running through to the end of the term, just in time for winter break.

'Children 5 to 11 represent one of the last groups in our community who have not yet been eligible for vaccination,' Dr. Pakes said. 'When we protect them, we also protect their families and the community as a whole. This is one of the most important milestones in ending the pandemic.'

As of Tuesday, November 23, Aurora has seen a total of 2,092 cases of COVID-19 since the start of the global pandemic, 2,034 of which are now marked as recovered.

The death toll remains static at 48.

Of the 10 active cases, 7 are attributed to local transmission, close contact or unknown exposure, 1 to travel, 1 to workplace exposure, and 1 to school exposure.

The community's vaccination rate stands at 90.6 per cent of eligible residents aged 12+ who have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while the rate of those who have received both doses stood at 88.7 per cent.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter