

80 per cent of York residents fully vaccinated: Region

More than 80 per cent of York Region residents aged 12 and up are now fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

This important milestone was announced by York Region Public Health last week.

By Thursday evening, September 16, more than 1.525 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered, according to Patrick Casey, Director of Corporate Communications for the Region of York.

This translates into 85 per cent of eligible York Region residents stepping up for their first shot, while more than 80 per cent have received two.

The increase in local eligibility rates comes just two weeks after the Provincial government announced its new proof of vaccination requirements for businesses and organizations.

Set to take effect this Wednesday, September 22, Queen's Park released guidance and regulations for those who will be tasked to verify vaccination status in select settings as well as for residents at large on how their proof of vaccination will work.

Once the rules take effect this week, unless there are valid exemptions, in order to enter a business or organization (with limited exceptions) you must provide both the required proof of identification and proof of being fully vaccinated.

One exemption will be for indoor social gatherings associated with weddings and funerals.

In these circumstances, there will be a grace period on proof of vaccinations. Until October 13, a negative result of a COVID-19 antigen test may be provided in lieu of proof of full vaccination.

An individual is considered fully vaccinated after a full series of COVID-19 vaccines authorized by Health Canada; one or two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada followed by one dose of a Health Canada-approved mRNA vaccine such as Pfizer or Moderna; three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada; and, in any of these circumstances, the final dose must be administered at least 14 days prior to providing the proof of vaccination status.

Businesses or organizations subject to the new rules include indoor areas of meeting and event spaces, indoor and outdoor areas of restaurants, bars, etc., including nightclubs (with exceptions for patios, delivery and takeout); indoor areas of sports and recreation facilities, including gyms, pools and water parks; casinos, bingo halls and other gaming establishments; concert venues, race tracks, and film studios.

Ontarians can now print or download their vaccine receipt from the Province's booking portal. The Ontario Government meanwhile is developing an enhanced vaccine certificate program with a unique QR code to "make it safer, more secure and convenient to show that you have been vaccinated when required to do so."

"High rates of vaccination against COVID-19 are critical to helping protect our communities and hospital capacity while keeping Ontario schools and businesses safely open," said Health Minister Christie Elliott. "As we continue our last mile push to increase vaccination rates, requiring proof of immunization in select settings will encourage even more Ontarians to receive the vaccine and stop the spread of COVID-19. If you haven't received your first or second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, please sign up today."

Added Kaleed Rasheed, Associate Minister of Digital Government: "Businesses need a smart, quick and safe solution to verify vaccination. The made-in-Ontario enhanced vaccine certificate for the public and the verification app for businesses are tools that confirm that an individual has been vaccinated while protecting Ontarians' health data."

THIRD DOSES FOR HIGH-RISK POPULATIONS

The Ontario Government will begin offering third doses of COVID-19 vaccine to additional groups in order to protect those who face highest risk from COVID-19 and the Delta variant.

Third doses will now be earmarked for those with moderate to severe primary immunodeficiency, individuals receiving active treatment for significantly immunosuppressive conditions, and those with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

Locations and timing for third doses will vary by public health unit, the Province notes.

Getting fully vaccinated is the most important step you can take to protect yourself and others, said Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health. To provide the best protection to some of our more vulnerable populations, we are offering a third dose to additional groups of immunocompromised people who are more likely to have had a less-than-adequate immune response to the two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series.

I continue to strongly encourage anyone eligible who hasn't come forward to get their COVID-19 shot, to do so today to do their part to keep themselves, their loved ones and our communities safe.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter