

All Ontarians 18+ eligible for vaccine come May 24

The light at the end of the tunnel has grown brighter following the Province of Ontario's announcement that all Ontarians 18 years of age and up will be eligible for their first doses of a COVID-19 vaccine by the end of this month.

The announcement, which was made by Health Minister Christine Elliott on Thursday, came amid calls from the Region of York for more vaccine supply.

The acceleration of the vaccine rollout is due to an expected increase in vaccine supply from the Federal Government.

By the start of this month, it was expected that 800,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine would begin arriving per week, ramping up to 940,000 doses per week by the end of May

?Ontario's vaccine rollout is continuing to focus on getting vaccines to those most at risk,? said Minister Elliott. ?With a stable and reliable supply of vaccines on the way, we will continue expanding access to the vaccine in communities across the Province, especially those areas that continue to be hit hardest by COVID-19. The best vaccine remains the first one you're offered and I strongly encourage everyone to sign up as soon as it is their turn.?

During the weeks of May 3 and May 10, 50 per cent of the vaccines are expected to be designated for hot spots, with an emphasis on mobile teams, pop-up clinics, mass immunization clinics, hospitals, primary care and pharmacies.

As of Friday, April 30, Ontarians 55+ were eligible to book a vaccine appointment, a move coinciding with a pilot program to distribute Pfizer to the same demographic in select pharmacies in Peel and Toronto.

But frustration is being felt in York Region, prompting a statement from Regional Chair Wayne Emmerson following the April 29 Regional Council meeting. On behalf of Council, he called on the Prime Minister and Premier to ?support efforts for equitable distribution? in all hot spots across Ontario.

?Since the beginning of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the health, safety and well-being of York Region's 1.2 million residents remains our top priority,? said Emmerson. ?Without an immediate increase in the supply of COVID-19 vaccines to York Region's 16 identified hot spots, we cannot fully expand vaccination efforts to fully protect residents and workers in these high priority communities.?

Ontario's Vaccination Distribution Plan has identified 13 hotspots in York Region, but the Region notes they have identified three more hotspot communities. Given the supply of vaccines, however, Public Health has had to prioritize just six of the 16 hotspots.

?Without an immediate increase in the supply of COVID-19 vaccines to York Region's 16 identified hot spots, we cannot fully expand vaccination efforts to fully protect residents and workers in these high priority communities,? said Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health.

REGION LAUNCHES VACCINE WAIT LIST

But, despite the continued shortage of vaccines, the Region has ramped up efforts to make sure every last drop goes into arms with the establishment of end-of-day wait lists for any vaccines left over from multi-dose phials.

This wait list pilot is open to all York Region residents, but is limited to the vaccine clinic at Vaughan's Maple Community Centre before any further expansion.

?The wait list functionality allows residents to add their name to a list for the opportunity to receive an end-of-day dose that may be

available due to a multi-dose vial being opened; a very limited number of doses may be available each day, up to a maximum of nine doses,? said Patrick Casey, Director of Corporate Communications for the Region.

?Those who wish to enroll on the wait list must be available between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. that day and able to visit the clinic within 15 minutes of being called; it is important to note adding a name to a wait list does not mean you will be called or you are guaranteed a vaccine. The wait list is created for the specific clinic day only and residents will need to add their name to a new wait list each day; only individuals who meet the current eligibility for that clinic can add their names to the wait list.?

To book your place on the wait list, visit York.ca/covid19vaccine.

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