

Boosters roll out as Public Health waits for word on kids' doses

As Public Health officials wait for word on when a COVID-19 vaccine will be approved for children between the ages of five and 11, the Region of York is rolling out booster shots to select groups.

Beginning this week, based on the recommendation of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, York Region Public Health is administering booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines to certain individuals who received their last dose of Pfizer or Moderna at least six months ago.

Groups currently eligible for boosters if they meet the timeline criteria include individuals aged 70 and older, healthcare workers and designated central caregivers in congregate settings (identified by the Ministry of Health), First Nations, Inuit and Metis adults, and people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised.

These individuals will benefit from a booster dose as they are of increased risk of waning immunity and greater risk of exposure, severe illness and severe outcomes, said Dr. Richard Gould, York Region's Acting Medical Officer of Health, at the start of the week. Offering the extra layer of protection provided by a third booster dose will contribute to the fight against COVID-19.

Others who have received two doses of AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines are also eligible for boosters.

Booster doses in York Region are being provided by appointment only, said Dr. Gould. York Region's COVID-19 vaccine clinics will continue to accept walk-ins for both first and second doses for all eligible individuals aged 12+. Residents can also receive their COVID-19 vaccine through many local pharmacies or health care providers. The Province expects to further expand booster doses to all eligible individuals aged 12 and up starting in early 2022.

While the current focus is on booster shots, administering COVID-19 vaccines to kids between five and eleven will not be soon behind, with Dr. Gould stating it is anticipated such approvals will come from Health Canada later this month.

We eagerly await Health Canada's approvals, guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), and recommendations from Ontario's Ministry of Health to further prevent COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, post-COVID condition and community spread, said Dr. Gould. We have been working diligently with the Ontario Government, York Region's school boards and hospital partners to prepare children to be vaccinated. We are also working closely with York Region's COVID-19 task force, including local physicians and health system partners, to develop plans for York Region. Every effort will be made to make the vaccination process as comfortable as possible for children and families, including support to reduce anxiety and vaccine-related fears.

Parents or substitute-decision-makers for children in this age group have to provide consent on behalf of the children at the time of the appointment before their child can receive a vaccine.

As of Monday, November 8, Aurora has seen 2,070 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the start of the global pandemic. 2,015 cases are now marked as recovered and there have been 48 fatalities attributed to the virus.

Of the 7 active cases, 6 are related to local transmission, close contact, or unknown exposure while 1 is in the school setting.

At the start of the week, Aurora's vaccination rate for eligible residents with one dose stood at 90.3 per cent, while the rate of residents with two doses was at 88 per cent.

By Brock Weir Editor/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter