

Now is not the time to throw caution to the wind, says Dr. Kurji as second doses ramp up

Everyone is eager to return to the lives we had before the pandemic, but now is not the time to throw caution to the wind, says Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health.

Dr. Kurji's note of caution came Monday as the Region of York crossed the threshold of 75 per cent of residents aged 12 and up receiving their first dose of a COVID-19, with nearly a quarter of the Region's eligible population having received a second dose.

The warmer weather is upon us and many of us are eager to get out to enjoy it, said Dr. Kurji. With many businesses opening as permitted in Step One of the Provincial Roadmap to Reopen, I want to take a moment to remind residents while we are excited to begin our recovery, we must continue to follow all public health measures to keep our community safe.

Sit on a patio, enjoy some outdoor recreation, and please support local businesses, but keep in mind now is not the time to throw caution to the wind. Please continue to wash your hands, physically distance from others, wear a mask, and get vaccinated as soon as you are eligible.

Everyone is eager to return to the lives we had before the pandemic, but we must be patient for a little while longer. If we continue to practice these public health measures, it will help move us to the next step in the Provincial framework, reopen further, and eventually be able to loosen the public health restrictions we have been following.

The next step on that road to recovery will come with a further expansion of vaccine eligibility this Friday. Currently, people who have received their first dose of an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) on or before May 9 are eligible to book a second dose. Eligibility will broaden further June 25 to anyone who lives, works, or goes to school in York Region who received their first dose of either vaccine on or before May 30.

By June 28, eligibility in York Region will be extended further to anyone 18+ who lives, works or goes to school in York Region to book their second shots at least 28 days after the first dose.

With respect to second doses, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has stated it is preferred to receive the same vaccine you received for your first dose; however, should that particular vaccine not be available at the time of your second dose, it is safe to mix mRNA vaccines, said Dr. Kurji. Individuals who received AstraZeneca as their first dose are now eligible to book a second dose of AstraZeneca at participating pharmacies or primary care clinics, or an mRNA vaccine at participating pharmacies, primary care clinics or mass vaccination clinics. It is an eight-week interval with informed consent.

NACI is advising it is preferable to have an mRNA vaccine as a second dose for those that received AstraZeneca as their first dose.

KURJI ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

Dr. Kurji, who has led York Region's fight against COVID-19, announced his retirement last week, effective September 30.

His retirement was initially slated for last year but was postponed as he was tasked with leading the local pandemic response.

COVID-19 is a public health crisis like one we have never experienced, but with the support of York Regional Council, we have been able to continuously respond to the ever-changing needs of our community, he said in a statement. I have also been enormously blessed to have the privilege of working with such talented York Region staff over the past 16 years. Whilst I am considered the face of York Region COVID-19 response, there continues to be many, many staff working tirelessly to keep our communities safe, both during and after this pandemic ends.

Dr. Kurji has worked in the field of public health for nearly 40 years and joined the Region of York in 2005 as Associate Medical Officer of Health and was appointed Medical Officer of Health shortly thereafter.

“On behalf of York Regional Council, I want to thank Dr. Kurji for his professionalism, dedication and commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of more than 1.2 million residents who call York Region Home,” said Regional Chair Wayne Emmerson. “With almost four decades of public service, there are so many accomplishments to highlight. However, for York Region, Dr. Kurji’s legacy will be his instrumental role in our ongoing fight against COVID-19.”

LOCAL STATS

As of Tuesday, June 22, Aurora has seen a total of 1,839 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, 3 of which remain active. 1,788 cases are now marked as resolved.

There have been 48 fatalities attributed to the virus.

Of the 3 active cases, all are related to local transmission, close contact or unknown exposure.

637 cases have been linked to variants of concern.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter