

Vaccinations open to York residents 65+

York Region residents born in or before 1956 are now eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations.

Registration for vaccines for the 65+ opened Wednesday morning, March 31.

At press time, approximately 15,000 new vaccine appointments were set to be opened at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex, Richmond Hill's Richmond Green Sports Centre, the Georgina Ice Palace, Markham's Aaniin Community Centre, and Vaughan's Maple Community Centre, Canada's Wonderland, and Vaughan Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital.

Registrations can be made online at [York.ca/COVID19vaccine](https://york.ca/COVID19vaccine).

The Region announced bookings for the 65+ on Tuesday amid continued uncertainty over the AstraZeneca vaccine and anticipated delays of the Moderna vaccine.

This delay will see the temporary closure of three vaccination sites, including the Georgina Ice Palace, Aaniin Community Centre, and Wonderland, just days after the drive-thru vaccination clinic was opened in the theme park parking lot.

These facilities will be closed between April 2 and 5 inclusive.

Although Aurora is currently without a community vaccination site, the Region has not ruled one out in the future.

Although the Region's vaccine efforts began the week with some good and bad news, positive trends were reported across York's nine municipalities.

Nearly 20 per cent of York Region residents between the ages of 70 and 74 received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccines by the start of the week, according to York Region Public Health.

In their weekly update on the local COVID-19 situation, the local Public Health unit reported some significant strides in the vaccination rollout last week, one which saw the age eligibility dropped to 70+, amid rising worries regarding variants of concern.

York Region continues to drive its mass immunization plan forward by building on the more than 140,000 vaccines that have already been administered, said Dr. Fareen Karachiwalla, Associate Medical Officer of Health for York Region, on Monday. Nearly 80 per cent of our 80+ population, 60 per cent of people aged 75-79, and nearly 20 per cent of our 70-74 age group have been immunized so far. This is fantastic progress and puts ahead of the Provincial plan. It is our hope to continue at the current pace in the coming weeks with a goal of moving down the five-year age brackets every week to ten days.

Our aggressive efforts to vaccinate as many residents as possible is essential as COVID-19 variants become the dominant strain. In York Region, variant cases now account for about 60 per cent of the daily reported cases. What is really important to know is that only one in 10 of our variant cases are found in the 70+ age group and the bulk is in the younger populations. We are seeing the highest number of variant cases in our 20-50-year-olds and we are seeing some hospitalizations and, very sadly, some deaths even amongst younger people.

Vaccinating younger age groups in hotspots will help curb the spread of the virus, she added, and York Region Public Health is in the midst of exploring targeted immunization strategies.

Given that a lot still needs to be done in terms of vaccinating our younger groups who are at risk, especially of the variants, it is crucial that we all remain vigilant and continue to follow public health measures, whether we have gotten our vaccine dose or not, said Dr. Karachiwalla. We are not at the point where enough people in the general public are vaccinated, so we do have to continue

to abide by our usual COVID-19 advice.

?York Region remains in the Red Zone and we need people to please continue to respect the rules. Wear face coverings indoors, maintain distancing, limit time with anyone outside your home, make use of the nicer weather and spend more time outdoors than indoors, and please watch closely for signs and symptoms and go get assessed, tested and self-isolate at any sign of COVID-like symptoms. We know other countries have loosened some of their rules because they are in a very different position than us. In Ontario and in Canada, we are just not there yet when it comes to the number of people vaccinated and the risk remains. Let's not undo the progress we made. Please continue to pay attention to public health advice, especially as we move into the long weekend and with the number of religious and cultural holidays in front of us.?

So far, as of March 30, 121 of Aurora's cases of COVID-19 have been linked to cases of concern. 17 of these cases have confirmed lineage, with the balance attributed to detected mutations without a clear picture of lineage.

The community has seen a total of 1,110 cases of COVID-19, 1,020 of which are now marked as recovered. There have been 42 fatalities.

Of the 48 active cases, 43 are related to local transmission or close contact, 3 to workplace cluster, 1 to travel, and 1 to an outbreak.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter