

## Vaccinations to reach residents 80+ beginning March 1: Kurji

As shipments of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine resume to Canada, York Region residents 80 years of age and older can expect to start receiving doses beginning at the start of the month.

According to Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Region is currently in Phase 1 of the Province's three-phase distribution plan, one which has seen targeted vaccinations at long-term care and retirement residents.

As part of Phase 1, we are now working with our hospital partners to vaccinate healthcare workers in priority sequence identified by the Ministry of Health, said Dr. Kurji on Monday in his weekly update on the global pandemic within York Region. The Province has also recently updated Phase 1 to include adults over the age of 80 and we expect to begin vaccinating residents aged 80+ by March 1.

The local vaccination program was subject to a special meeting of Regional Council last week.

Following the session, Dr. Kurji said it was important to underscore the prioritization of potential vaccine recipients and the expansive planning that has been taking place to get centres like the clinic at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex up and running, and the planning that has been taking place behind-the-scenes as inoculations ramp up.

This plan involves many partners, including physicians, public health nurses, hospitals and many other community partners, he said. Reaching our vaccination targets will be a total team effort. It is important for our residents to realize we have a plan and it includes reaching priority groups of people in a variety of different ways and we intend to reach all segments of the population.

We have representation from many different sectors on our task force for immunization and [are] sensitive to the needs of many diverse and sector-specific individuals. We need residents to know our ability to quickly administer vaccines is based on supply. We will roll out the vaccine as rapidly as possible as supplies become available. We don't want to keep any vaccines in our freezers.

Vaccines, he said, are safe, effective and the best way to protect yourself from serious illness. He also stressed the vaccines that have been approved and rolling out are not live vaccines and do not contain the virus.

Therefore, the vaccine cannot give you COVID-19. After two doses, both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are approximately 95 per cent effective. It can take up to seven to 14 days after the second dose to achieve this protection. We are already seeing positive impacts of the vaccine in our long-term care and retirement homes with majority of residents having received both doses of the vaccine.

When it is your turn, we highly encourage you to get vaccinated. Together with our partners, we are all working hard to keep our community safe and to get people vaccinated when we can. But we need the community's support. We must all keep going and take steps to avoid the spread of this virus. Please avoid all non-essential travel outside Canada until further notice. If you test positive for COVID-19, providing all history of contacts and contact information is crucial to limiting the spread. Please be cooperative and kind to our case and contact investigators. We need to work together to keep the virus from spreading to more of our friends and families.

As of Tuesday, February 23, Aurora has seen a total of 914 confirmed cases of COVID-19, 20 of which remain active. There have been 854 recoveries and 40 deaths attributed to the virus.

Of the active cases, 15 are attributed to local transmission or close contact, 2 to institutional outbreak, 2 to workplace cluster, and 1 to travel.

**By Brock Weir** Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter