

Vaccine supply hampering York's efforts as Aurora deals with more than 100 active cases

More than 11,000 new appointments for COVID-19 vaccinations were opened by York Region Public Health on Tuesday, but delays in obtaining an adequate supply of Pfizer and Moderna continue to hamper efforts to expand the program further.

On April 13, York Region announced a further expansion of vaccination appointments to several key demographics. These include individuals (and one of their caregivers) with highest and very high-risk health conditions identified by the Province's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan, as well as special education staff who work in York Region.

Due to a limited supply of vaccinations expected to arrive in York Region this week, however, the age bracket for those who live in five previously identified high priority communities in Vaughan and Markham has been changed from 45-59 to 45-54 between April 14 and 17. Additionally due to delays in the shipment of Moderna vaccines, clinics at Canada's Wonderland and the Georgina Ice Palace were temporarily closed due to lack of supply.

"Over the next six weeks, we have the capacity to administer 10,000 doses per day for a total of 390,000 doses," said Dr. Fareen Karachiwalla, York Region's Associate Medical Officer of Health, on Monday. "However, the expected vaccine supply will leave a notable gap of more than 165,000 doses. Over the coming weeks, please continue to remain patient with us. We are doing all that we can to plan, make provisions, and get through the priority groups based on what we have available to us. We have already steadily progressed through the priority groups identified in Phase 1 and have already begun vaccinating some groups in Phase 2 ahead of the Provincial schedule. In fact, to date, York Region has administered over 250,000 doses and nearly one in five York Region residents have actually had their first dose. This is pretty remarkable progress to date and we are very grateful for it."

Although the Province of Ontario has announced mobile teams are being organized to administer vaccines in high-risk congregate settings, residential buildings, "faith-based locations" and locations occupied by large employers in COVID-19 hot spots to people aged 18+, Dr. Karachiwalla noted that the situation remains strained locally.

"York Region's Public Health immunization strategy is restricted to what we can achieve with our limited vaccine supply," she said. "In fact, due to our current shortage in vaccine supply, we only have a limited number of appointments available this week and have been forced to close two of our public health-led clinics. We are looking ahead though to offer vaccines soon for individuals aged 60+ as well as additional education staff, essential workers and residents in other remaining hot spot communities identified by the Province."

Residents of York Region aged 55+ are also eligible to book vaccine appointments at select York Region pharmacies.

In accordance with recent recommendations from the Ministry of Health, transplant patients and some cancer patients are encouraged to get their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccines "as close to the 21- to 28-day timeframe as possible," added Patrick Casey, York Region's Manager of Corporate Communications.

As of Tuesday, April 13, Aurora has seen a total of 1,323 cases of COVID-19. 1,154 cases are now marked as resolved and there have been 42 fatalities.

Of the 127 active cases, 119 are attributed to local transmission or close contact, 4 to workplace cluster, and 4 to institutional outbreak.

245 cases related to variants of concern have been identified in Aurora to date, with just 24 of confirmed lineage. 69 cases related to variants of concern remain active.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter